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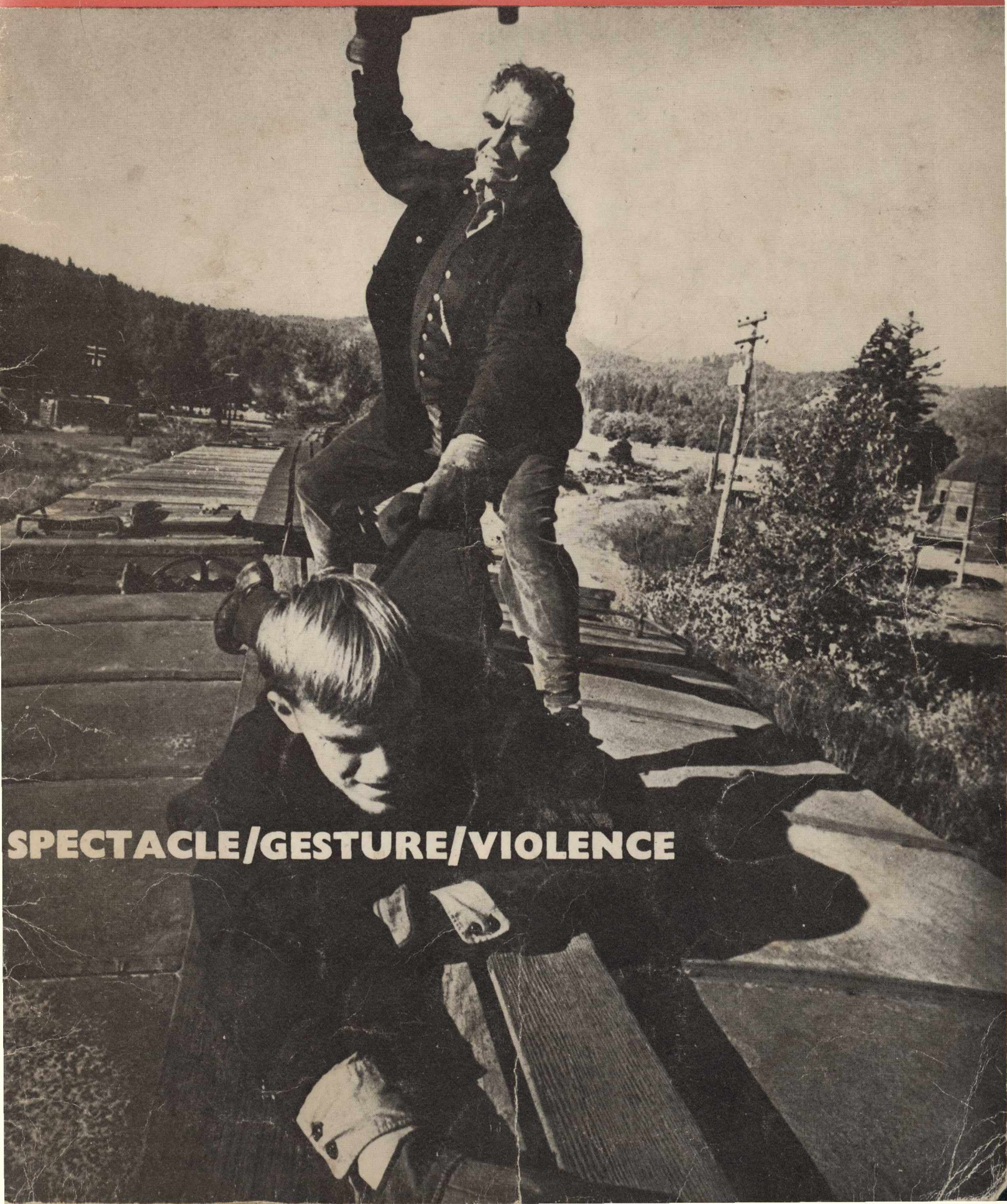

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Front Cover Ernest Borgnine and Keith Carradine in **The Emperor of the North**

Back Cover Elliott Gould in **California Split**

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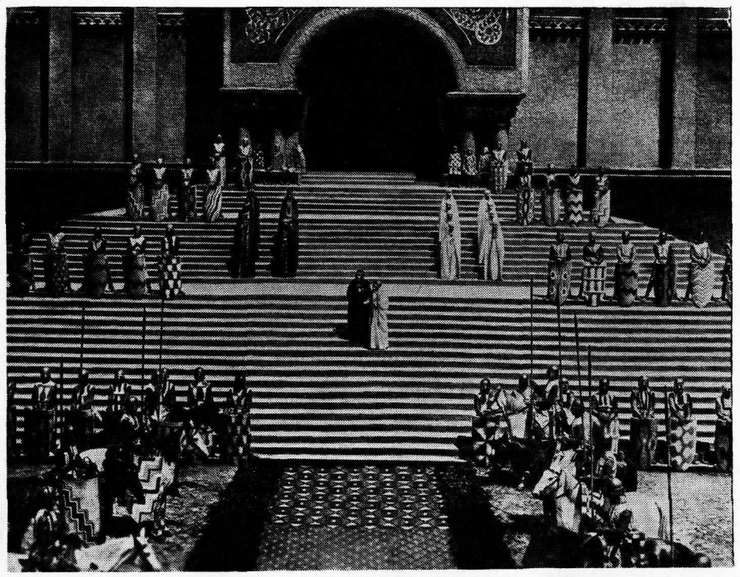
Problems on the staging of history



Line, pattern, gesture: the theatrical poise of Lang's Nibelungen

There are ways of talking about the cinema — certain key oppositions, certain time-honoured phrases and gestures — a whole shorthand or repertoire of film journalism which soon becomes familiar to anyone who takes the least interest (beyond a perfunctory reading of weekly reviews) in what used to be called the cinema as art form. *One wants to lie in wait for these phrases and capture them when they are off-guard. What does it mean to talk about — to go talking about — "auteur" and "genre", montage and realism, appearance/reality as if these terms and terms like them did not have to be constantly revalidated and* forged a new *in succeeding epochs of criticism? Thus the question arises which the following article tries to formulate, how above all can* realism — *the realism of classical commercial cinema — be discussed intelligently while at the same time accommodating the knowledge of how irrevocably in modern film writing realism is distrusted? The emphasis placed by the "semiology" of such different writers as Noel Burch, Peter Wollen, and the editorial board of Screen magazine on the activity of criticism as the "deconstruction" of a transparent and fluent film-text into its signifying particles can be interpreted — perhaps even misinterpreted — as the disdainful rejection of all those narrative ruses which function to keep the surface of the movie tight and coherent and in a word (shorthand) "realistic". And yet in this polemic the precise definition of cinema's style or realism remains curiously unexamined. At what utopian point between "naturalism" and caricature does classical American cinema offer — in Sirk's phrase — its imitation of life? It is here, incidentally, that one might be excused for finding puzzling the current use made of Brecht as a figurehead in whom the various important avant-garde concepts are subsumed: whereas one would have thought that it was the Brecht who had something to say about, precisely, realism who had most to offer the potential critique of the Hollywood aesthetic. One invokes here of course not only the biographical fact of Brecht's personal artistic preferences (realism, but again, what* kind *of realism?), but more specifically the fruitful concept of social "gestus", elaborated in Walter Benjamin's essays recently translated into English as* Understanding Brecht *(New Left Books 1973). It is exactly as the continuing analysis of* gesture *in the Hollywood cinema (initiated for our purposes by Thomas Elsaesser's article on melodrama in Monogram 4) that the following piece takes its cue. Gesture is the moment of connection between acting and mise-en-scène which allows one to speak of the character of traditional narrative cinema as being* both *"naturalistic" (to a far greater extent than the stage can ever allow)* and *at the same time stylized, "typical", epic, the vehicle not so much of* social *mannerisms (except where it is specifically satirical), but of social manner itself. It is between these dialectical poles that the realism of Hollywood and in fact of European cinema begins to be defined more interestingly. On the one hand a unique, non-repeatable instant — a glance, say between actress and actor in Rossellini's* Viaggio in Italia *— of such irrecoverable beauty that it is no longer right to talk about acting, so perfect is the naturalism: and on the other hand the fact of that scene's being filmed in traditional reverse diagonal over-the-shoulder shots, locking the protagonists into a tableau of formalised intensity as, to speak metaphorically, previous generations of artists had accomplished with such fervour only in painting (Caravaggio, Rubens, Delacroix). One chooses as an example a moment of emotional resonance simply to stress that realism in the cinema cannot be considered outside its affective, "phatic" context: the sense in other words — which goes far to define cinema as a popular art, and brings in of course its whole mechanics of audience identification, shock, suspence, eroticism etc — of lived experience whereby cinema translates abstract issues into moral conflicts and uses the human body itself as the vector of those conflicts. The exceptionally formalised way by which in the cinema mental and moral distinctions are exteriorised into physical energy and gesture is only one of the more puzzling aspects of any attempt to define film as a realistic medium. Gesture itself sustains an incredibly complicated balance between the real, the ideal and the remembered; criticism in the past has dealt with it mainly in relation to epic, where one gets, for example in Homer, a kind of repertoire of repeated descriptive devices which have nothing to do with a lack of originality on the part of the poet, but which function (as perhaps do the stock ruses of melodrama) on an altogether more sophisticated aesthetic economy largely related to epic's oral (and therefore more literally "phatic") origins. Presided over by the goddess Mnemosyne, epic is the fertile concourse of both reverie and realism — as is the cinema! In either case one has the strange feeling of seeing something not only for the first time, but as* if we have always known it. *It is not for nothing that especially in movies scenes of intense, heightened realism are referred to as as "hallucinatory". The combination of eroticism, visual clarity and "narrative" dynamics makes the realism of cinema similar in many ways to the realism of dreams — as the recent vogue for psychoanalysing individual movies (Welles, Hitchcock) is beginning to find out.*

This is the somewhat dangerous ground *on which the film researcher currently finds himself. Where does history come into his speculations? Well then: to the extent that his investigation is worthwhile, he will find the reflection history gives out assimilated into cinema not so much in terms of content as of form. In which case, and assuming these forms develop, is not his use of the term* classical *problematic, and where, so far as Hollywood is concerned, can classicism be located?*

It is here that some of the contentions of the following article have come to seem provisional. Having pitched one's main area of investigation in the classical American cinema, and restricted it for the purposes of convenience to asking how that cinema deals with history, one is caught in the problem of how modern *American cinema manages to continue developing its own autonomous forms. It is this continual search (eg through the harnessing of nostalgia) for a vocabulary to express experience (pathos) divorced from the reified modalities of tragedy, that these notes are just in danger of being too moralising about.*

Whereas the second feature article of this issue attempts to take a closer look at this very question, identifying the problems of parody and self-consciousness that go with it, but also the continuing inventiveness and intelligence; and finally trying to assess in this tentative and interim period of filmmaking the overall chances of success and failure.

> "The angles are a director's thoughts. The lighting is his philosophy. Even to this extent: long before Wittgenstein, I and some of my contemporaries learned to distrust language" (Douglas Sirk from *Sirk on Sirk* (1971) ed. J. Halliday p. 40)

The pressures of distance, availability and finally of interest combine to qualify the ways in which one can speak of the seven or eight main English language film journals as being in debate. Yet there remains a tentative sense in which issues seem to recur, whether these issues are treated superficially or with the utmost obliqueness. Among these the rediscovery, if not the wakening up to the wealth and complexity of Hollywood's past by a growing number of American film writes seems to offer as a ready made subject the investigation of the relations between cinema and history.

Yet this current mood of retrospective which characterizes the latest excellent issues of so many American film magazines might equally serve to soften what debate there is in a haze of nostalgia. Why is it that the "special issue" on such and such a topic of Hollywood history — the work of a particular studio in a given era, for example — so invariably fails to come up to the mark? The *incisive analysis* one dreamed of is lost in a collection of articles that remain obstinately heterogeneous. Doubtless these are conjunctures — ideological and aesthetic — which continue to be better written about, more hardly driven, in Europe than in the United States. The need in America for a dynamic, modern, political cinema to replace the work of the *old masters* is a salutary reminder that, properly grasped, the writing about history is only another way — only a more convenient way — of writing about the present. Yet when all is said, Hollywood continues to offer a mediated series of interpretations of its own and America's past history which, taken together, still constitutes an amazingly impressive body of work.

One of the most interesting elements of this has always been the way that the ideological residue of American pictures — as it comes out through the success of certain genres, certain formulae, — cannot be pinned down as easily as it can in the European cinema to some simple notion of the auteur. Unlike the novel, the cinema revels in composite authorship, the strands of which are only beginning to be individually disentangled. The process will be long and interesting and more complicated than auteur criticism ever dreamed of. The particular studios involved, the present demands of the market, the lack of availibility of some directors and the coercion of others — in a word the *politics* of Hollywood filmmaking have to be taken into account and made to stand as certain evidence where for the first time one can begin to see the phenomenon of Hollywood historically. Thus, as far as history is concerned it is the fact that we are not offered in the American cinema a single artist's "interpretation of events" (as, in literature, Stendhal or Tolstoy might write about the Napoleonic wars) which provides the whole interest and difficulty. The promiscuous origins of these movies are all the greater challenge to those who set out to analyse them — or to psychoanalyse them!

But first, an older debate. "The Cinema and History": an investigation along these lines might seem to presuppose an interest in one genre above others. We are now so used to the filmed epic — the historical spectacular — that it is hard even if we have for the thousandth time witnessed its astonishing incarnation in Griffith to grasp the full importance of its being the cinema's single major contribution to the vocabulary of artistic forms. Yet up until recently it would be more usual to cite the Epic, especially where it comes out of Hollywood, as the very evidence of the cinema's stupidity. The liberation of the crowd from the statuesque incapacity it enjoyed on the stage of even such progressive directors as Meyerhold (not to mention the ritualised and, as the phrase is, "reactionary" dramas of

Gordon Craig) was seen as nothing more than certain proof of the cinema's total incapacity to distinguish between *showing* a particular series of events and, in the timeless comparison, *reflecting* on them. The distinction remains to plague aesthetic thinking on drama and film, more particularly in the hands of an eclectic marxist criticism, *as a stick to beat cinema with.* This is the explanation for the otherwise unaccountable fervour with which the debate (to my mind factitious) *montage versus neo-realism* is kept alive: montage, so the argument runs, providing the dialectical, objective, positioning element of a given scenario, against which the naive claims of a realistic cinema are always to be confounded.

Yet the mention of Meyerhold and Craig serves as a reminder that even before their time the rival positions *presentation against interpretation* had been debated in terms of a specifically theatrical mise-en-scene. In fact, in the nineteenth century it was exactly over the question of how to mount historical drama that the argument first became acrimonious, and where was first heard the now common complaint that the emphasis on *size* and *accuracy* in props and costumes was somehow importunate and unnecessary. In due course murmurs against the "realistic" setting of Shakespeare and Hugo's grandiose historical pageants became, mutatis mutandis, the dissatisfaction felt with the naturalistic drama of the eighties and nineties. The *real carcass of beef* displayed in a stage production of Antoine's Theatre Libre at this period, and which supposedly did for the theatre what Zola was accomplishing in the novel, that is, symbolised a certain standard of authenticity, was somehow *felt to miss the point.* The reaction against this slavish adherence to fact was formulated in terms of an experimental theatre, pioneered, as is well documented elsewhere, by artists precisely of the calibre of Craig and Meyerhold. It only needed a robust and highly intelligent tradition of marxist dramaturgy concerning itself very specifically with questions of history to cement the point that accuracy as such has very little to do with understanding the process of history — always supposing that it is the process of history rather than any of its other manifestations that is the agreed desideratum.

This view of the legitimate aims of staged historical epic — a view one might for the sake of convenience call "Brechtian" in its more intelligent incarnations — is by now so much taken for granted, and with it a preference for a formalised, abstract method of staging such drama, that it is very hard to make any discriminations. At the risk of sounding the obvious note it is necessary to insist first and foremost that the cinema is not the theatre. One of the consequences of the development of cinema in the last fifty years is that it has imperceptibly solved some elements of the rival theories of drama I have been talking about — or rather, made them no longer an issue. No one now feels constrained as they did when confronted with Stanislavski's productions to shout "Down with realism!" The cinema has appropriated the real world so successfully that the representation of natural objects is no longer problematic, since they no longer function in quite the same way *as props* to swamp the drama with verisimilitude and thus deprive it of its point. It is as if by the simple fact of being photographed they cease to become importunate: or, to put it another way, they cease to become symbolic; this is to say, they cease to become aggressively symbolic — which in the majority of cases amounts to the same thing. In fact one of the unexamined triumphs of the cinema as opposed to the stage is the delicacy with which symbolism can again be handled — making the films of Losey or Hitchcock, for instance, a marvellous demonstration of how the camera effects (that is, realises, makes possible) the metaphorical status of the objects it focusses on.

I think similar qualifications, in terms of how the cinema solves certain issues of representation, could be extended to how it deals with the large general problem of history. The very fact that the debate between "montage" and "realism" is so old absolves us at the outset from insisting that there is any correct way of representing historical spectacle. History itself — who needs reminding? — is but an interpretation of events, and there are numerous examples available in literature to prove that there are insights to be gained even when the tale is recounted from what might ironically be called the wrong angle (it was Ezra Pound who summarised this defence of a dissenting view of history in the Malatesta Cantos: "Sono tutti eretici, signor Pio, ma non sono cattivi" etc.) Perhaps to mention Pound is already to give the wrong emphasis. One is interested here not so much in theories or interpretations of history with the implied correlative of an objective, controlling intelligence (whether that intelligence belongs to Pound or to Brecht), as in extrapolating from effects which have more to do with intrinsic qualities of the medium than with their treatment in the hands of individual artists. The first of these brings us back to the cinema's greater capacity for crude realism, glossed at its simplest as *accuracy* of costumes, setting, pageant and battle scenes. Traditionally this realism is felt to be inopportune or even fatuous because it coexists with an even greater *lack* of realism in other features of the production, notably dialogue, the careless ruin of many a Hollywood spectacular. Anachronism can be accommodated and even encouraged on the stage (as it frequently is in Shaw where it passes for a deliberate aimed effect), but not in the cinema where it lacks a literary alibi and can safely be relegated in the critic's imagination to the assumed incompetence of some "hack" screenwriter. The best answer to this, as I shall argue later, is simply that dialogue is relatively unimportant — most easily proved by seeing the epic in question in a foreign language, preferably one the spectator knows as little as possible.

The whole question of what constitutes "literariness" in these matters is of the greatest interest. The irony is that the stage itself with its far greater premium on the spoken word has been unable to solve in the twentieth century the issue of a plausible spoken drama; hence many experiments, ranging from the solemn to the kitsch, in the direction of forging a new verse form suitable for the stage. The cinema could be said to solve this dilemma simply in the relative lack of emphasis it places on the spoken gesture. This is part of its own lucky development, since we don't need to be reminded that in the era of the *silent screen* the issue was looked after more completely than ever. There simply was no spoken dialogue; the banal quality of the sub-titles which accompanied the narrative (so great a stumbling block to even the most sophisticated modern audience) properly glossed merely underlines what for me is the always productive discrepancy between the perfunctory, ad-hoc origins of the plot, and the compelling emotional intensity by which it was so often in the event realised.

Epic reconstructions: the Moors in Anthony Mann's El Cid

*

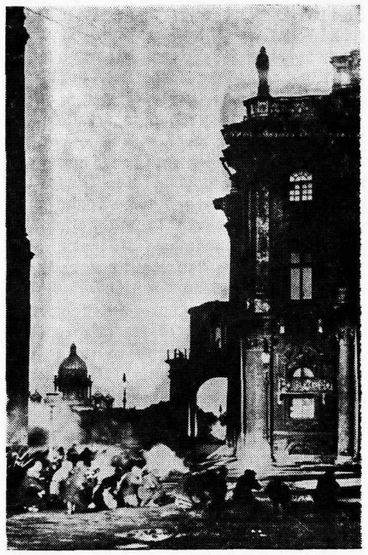
Does this mean that interest in cinematic spectacle is entirely based on its qualities as a visual spectacle? For the reasons already touched on this seems an unrespectable point of view, although if painting rather than the cinema were considered it would be reasonable enough. I take it, for instance, that no one would dream of taxing Delacroix with the accusation that his magnificent, sombre historical canvases were "merely spectacle". So with the cinema: it cannot be said too often that the lavishly authenticated background — so easily dismissed — of the best Hollywood epics of the 50's and 60's is the result of pains and of creative intelligence. This is partly a function of money, of course, and partly an historical accident: the availability of fine designers and craftsmen who were capable of executing plans on this scale. The decisive reward in all this is not so much magnificence and grandeur (although in *El Cid* there are a series of tableaux in which the colour red receives perhaps its most astonishing definition since the Renaissance), as the confirmation or reminder, which the stage is unable to provide, that, as it were, so much of history takes place *out of doors.* The consequence of this has as much to do with the anonymous crowd of extras who, so to speak, flesh out the canvas, as it has to do with the principal actors themselves. In the theatre the staging of crowd scenes has always been difficult and became doubly so in Russia when, in the wake of 1917, the crowd was transformed from mute spectators of history into its major architect. By 1905 the naturalistic stage business of the popular Meiningen stage troupe which had held sway for twenty years, whereby each extra had his own movements carefully rehearsed and differentiated from his neighbour, was replaced by Craig with a theory of mass movement more in keeping with the hieratic, ritualised quality of his dramaturgy. Meyerhold, in turn, was to celebrate the newly-enfranchised "Mass-Man" with a theory of stage movement known as Biomechanics, derived in part from the psychology of William James, which formally if not ideologically repeated the emphasis Craig had established on crowd movement as *abstract gesture.* It was Griffith in the cinema, and following him Eisenstein and Lang, who, unencumbered with high-flown theories of movement, almost by accident liberated the crowd from the director's whim, so that "history" for audiences in those early filmed epics became an overwhelming sense of *being there.* This sense of experiencing events as they occur which is the outcome of the cinema's triumphant naturalism — the reward of all that authenticity of recreation — remains for the epic its most distinguishing characteristic, upsetting in the process the uneasy, cliched opposition between montage and neo-realism, so that the salient comparison is not, as the standard film histories claim, between a film that shows a series of actions and a film that suggests the causes of those actions (between, say, Pabst's *Westfront 1918* and Dovzhenko's *Arsenal,* to use the example from Siegfried Kracauer), but, overwhelmingly, between the cinema and theatre itself.

*

It goes without saying that the view of history expressed in such movies has little to do with historical materialism. Of the major epics of the directors already mentioned, Griffith's *Intolerance* forwards a teleological and religious rationalization of history, Lang's *Nibelungen* no less than Wagner's translates history into saga, Eisenstein's *Ivan* presents a clear case of history in the service of ideology, and it is the very point of the closing sequences of Anthony Mann's epic that his hero El Cid rides out of history into legend. Yet it is only fair to add that there remains, when all is said, a sense in which the traditional opposition between montage and realism, serving as a shorthand distinction between American and Russian theories of classical film-making, has a certain usefulness. It is perhaps odd that the distinction is not always so automatically in favour of the Russians as is sometimes thought; (in Eisenstein's late writings there is a kind of *fetishization* of montage that seems to me dubious, even politically. In terms of a supposed rigour of statement it simply cannot carry the weight it is meant to bear). To take an obvious instance of this contrast, the premium which montage places on "comment" implies a whole cinema of allusion and with it the invocation of an extra-cinematic set of conventions and expectations, in contrast to the more self-contained codes and self-generating discourse of Hollywood. Allusion in its literary incarnation is only another word for irony and it is in the Russian cinema of the heroic early years that we find, with all its febrile experimentation, the completest example of a traditionally theatrical, polemical, allusive conception of mise-en-scene: a satirical cinema boldly availing itself of an awakened and shared political culture. Soviet film-making of those years was a critical and allusive enterprise, where it could be assumed that the joke about Kerensky turning into a peacock *(October)* needed no further explanation.

This kind of open confrontation with recent history — literally, a *restaging* of history which finds its culmination in the kind of grand gesture of *October* or *The End of St. Petersburg* where whole sections of a city are taken over to re-enact events still relatively fresh in the minds of the combatants — does not exist in the American cinema, where the issues (crime, politics, class struggle or whatever) are deflected into genres and emerge in a more mediated, complex, dissipated form (that is their interest), often enough — in contrast to the artistic avant-garde of the Russians — under the guise of mere entertainment, as, finally, "trash": the gangster movie, the western, the historical epic. An example of how the American cinema avoids explicitly articulating even the most obvious historical parallel can be found in Coppola's movie *The Conversation* where any audiences expecting direct references to Watergate would have been disappointed. This is part of "classical" film-making's reluctance to go in for satire and, even more, for caricature (there are exceptions of course). As a consequence, the disguise which social comment in the American cinema is forced to adopt ensures that the most subtle and interesting internal critiques of American society are to be found not only in movies with specifically historical subjects (biopics, costume dramas, romances etc.) where the already known facts of the case tend to encourage traditional and conformist interpretations (also the result of simply more money being spent on these films), but equally in such "minor" genres as the B western or women's melodrama of the 50's in which social comment insinuates itself in terms of style rather than subject matter. (see "Tales of Sound and Fury" in Monogram no 4, Melodrama issue). Style as intelligence: the rigour of mise-en-scene in the films of Sirk and Ray standing as a kind of guarantee of *their* historical and political awareness (making one examine with all the greater interest the new, elliptical, fragmentary mode of narrative establishing itself as the modern Hollywood vernacular; see for example some of the films of Altman, Coppola, Hellman, and Jack Nicholson discussed later).

This is not to imply that the American film industry does not have its ear extremely close to the ground when it comes to sounding out contemporary issues: too close sometimes, as in its disastrous courting of student radicalism



The city as stage: The End of St Petersburg

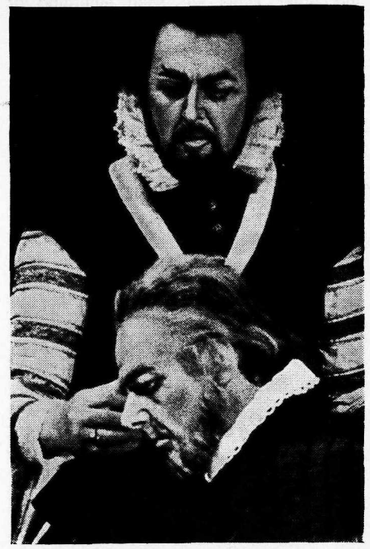
in the late 60's. Yet to take another example, the rise of the gangster film very early in the 30's demonstrates the remarkably short time lag between the historical events themselves and their re-enactment in a suitable fictional incarnation. (As is well known, at much the same time as this, Warner Brothers were producing a series of progressive, documentary-style feature films protesting against some of the more crying social abuses of the period.) It remains true, nonetheless, that in the majority of cases "straight" history is too exacting a discipline for Hollywood. The attempt to find an immediate translation of the contradictions of American society into filmic material tends to rather timidly cut the moral concerns. This would be the definition of a certain liberal cinema, if it hadn't already been provided under the heading "strained seriousness" in Andrew Sarris's excellent directory. The "problem movie" is of course itself already a genre, and as such is already filtering and colouring and disguising contemporary history as much as any of the other recognised Hollywood conventions. Only here the ideological message is perhaps too naked for comfort, rather like the current spate of television serials about police detectives *(Kojak, Madigan, Columbo* etc.) where, as their names imply, the one ideological constant throughout the differing weekly episodes remains a kind of thinly-veiled ethnic liberalism.

•

Where montage emerges in serious film criticism as the considered aesthetic criterion, it is usually accompanied by a preference for a marked stylization, often veering towards abstraction. It is interesting to pick up the negative effects of this: behind most writings which favour montage there emerges clearly what can best be described as an *hostility to realism.* The film-writer who is intellectually on his guard is always wary of being, as he thinks, "seduced by spectacle". Against the expenditure and skill which Hollywood lavishes on producing an immaculate verisimilitude — to the extent of building whole towns, utilizing real machinery etc — the characteristic stance of a certain criticism is that it will *refuse to be impressed.* The suspicion of large-scale spectacle, which amounted in many cases to asking whether cinema can be "serious" or not, is very like the literary reception given to opera in the nineteenth century. The tendency of French and Italian opera to convert political issues into sexual intrigue (since political censorship was more hostile than the other kind), matched in its own way by the cinema's predominant *violence* and *eroticism,* is taken to task in either case for distorting the real causes of events. But like opera, the effectiveness of cinematic spectacle rests very little upon the literary qualities of the text (the notorious incompetence of some of Verdi's librettists matched only by the excesses of Hollywood screenwriting departments), establishing in either case the paramount critical enquiry as one of *performance.* The quality of film and opera resides chiefly in adequate realisation rather than in adequate conception. The experience of watching a movie, never sufficiently taken account of by film criticism (so that an audience-oriented aesthetics would have to concern itself with the *mechanics* of the viewing situation) finds its equivalent in the importance placed by opera on the "actual night", a stress on the singer's expressiveness as much as on the intrinsic quality of the music, for which Wagner's writings *(The Artwork of the Future* (1849), *Opera and Drama* (1850-51)) might provide a kind of systematic framework. In fact German opera rather than French or Italian gives us rather better instances of the debate. There have been a variety of defences of the spectacular non-literary elements of opera in this tradition: and a stress on the legitimate *projection of feeling* against charges of "sensationalism" can be traced in the form of a dialogue between composer and librettist from the writings of E.T.A. Hoffman in the nineteenth century to an early 20th century opera like Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* surfacing temporarily in Brecht's Messingkauf Dialogues, to find its uneasy resolution in critics like Eric Bentley and Joseph Kerman, where the crucial distinctions are couched once more in terms of an inability to make up their minds about Wagner and Strauss.

This is simply to recognize that there is an all-important affective or emotional element — what the linguist Roman Jakobson names its *phatic aspect* — attached to performance, which concentration on text alone is unable to elucidate. (This incidentally is why thematic criticism involving itself with, say, the movies of Samuel Fuller or Nicholas Ray is so unsatisfactory, since what is really important in terms of their vigour, economy and style always remains unspoken, even unreachable.) The emotional charge of opera — at its lowest sheer noise, at its highest the extraordinary wall of combined music and human voice in Wagner — translated into the "expressive" mise-en-scene of early silent cinema as lighting, gesture, musical accompaniment,

The baroque: Visconti's Senso



Operatic confrontations: Philip II (Clifford Grant) and Posa (Benjamin Luxow) in Verdi's Don Carlos

could stand as the very definition of melo-drama (see Monogram no. 4), and thus provide an explicit conceptual link between the two media. It would be tempting, while avoiding the obvious trap of setting up some evolutionary teleology of forms in the manner of the young Lukacs, to see the degree an art-form requires this phatic component as changing from generation to generation. One could cite examples from the nineteenth century — celebrated letters from Schiller to Goethe, poems by Goethe himself (see the marvellous elegy "Euphrosyne" addressed to the Weimar actress Christiane Neumann), early writings on tragedy of Nietzsche etc etc — as privileged instances where in the face of the usual literary prejudices opera, or something like it, is seen as both more arresting and more forceful than contemporary drama, just as opera in turn finds itself precariously placed in the 20th century, not yet ready to give way before the furious onslaught of cinema. If the tendency to *turn away from the world* which one finds in German opera, at any event in Wagner, has as a consequence little to say about history, the portrayal of historical events in the cinema inherits opera's emotional intensity in the emphasis it has always placed on *violence, gesture* and *spectacle.* One might even speak of these as being the formal qualifications for history ever being successfully put over on the screen.

If the comparison between the respective critical receptions given to opera and cinema has any value — it is perhaps only very limited — it is to show that the same uncertainty about how seriously to take either genre drives one from considering their subject matter to a quite abstract consideration of their form. Translated into its formal equivalent, then, the phatic or emotional element in either genre is perhaps best rendered as "rhythm." This of course is extremely difficult to talk about, as by definition it can only be felt rather than pointed to (hence the awkwardness it offers a *semiology of film* like that of Metz since it precisely cannot be coded.) It is rhythm that provides the most salient difference between the cinema and stage, at any event, operating a kind of retrospective critique of the latter, to the extent that any stage performance of a play *not* accompanied by musical punctation and rapid shifts of scene now seems unbelievably static: — a state of affairs actually put to rather good use by playwrights like Becket and Pinter. But it also differentiates cinema strongly from opera. The requirements of aria and ensemble singing ensure that history on the operatic stage unfolds by a kind of leisurely intensity, in which victim and oppressor, locked in a musical web, partake of the same lyrical expansiveness (think of the "inquisition" scenes in *Fidelio* and *Don Carlos).* There is always something *stately* in operatic anguish which has everything to do with the enforced stillness of the combatants as they deliver themselves of their dramatically opposite points of view, into which harmony is yet so strongly interwoven. (Doubtless the ideological residuum of this — Italian opera providing the most obvious example — is a bourgeois notion of dignity and self-expression, rather suitable for those national parliaments which nineteenth century liberal thinking was so anxious to constitute, so that in a certain perspective Italian opera can be seen as nothing so much as practice in the art of "debate"). In contrast to opera the rapid changes of pace caused by the pervasive cutting in classical editing procedures used by the cinema, coupled by the more egregious use of music as simply punctation and mobility of camerawork which enables the director to practise extreme economy of exposition — in a word the whole *concision* of classical Hollywood film-making — all combine to suggest that rhythm in the American cinema is not, as cliché suggests, one of smoothness and blandness whereby the audience is encouraged to "mistake" the represented spectacle for something called "real life" (that whole mythology of the development of film technique which *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Cinethique* have been busy palming off as history). On the contrary, nothing is easier to demonstrate than the fact that rhythm in the American cinema is an achievement of pace, of punctation, of economy, of shock; and as such may be said to mirror the recurrent definition of dramatic action in so many American movies — the films of Lang, Ray, Fuller etc — as *violence* and *quest.*

With quest converted into spectacle, one has only to cite the genre of war-film or western to see history in the American cinema as a veritable canvas of violence. Is it surprising how "unideological" this view of history turns out to be? The emphasis on individual drama within the wider spectrum of events keeps the narrative extraordinarily hermetic. The unwillingness — except in a handful of cases, Ford perhaps the most obvious — to suggest outside causes for the actions which take place has the practical effect of de-historicising any episodes that are based on fact. (Peter Lloyd's commentary on *They Died With Their Boots On* in the much maligned Raoul Walsh handbook brilliantly demonstrates this process: he only omitted to contrast it with Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man,* also about the events leading up to Custer's last stand, to show how the latter differs from Walsh's characteristically apolitical stance towards history, and to speculate on some possible reasons behind this).

The complete dependence on narrative impetus to carry the story, rather than relying on our previous historical knowledge and expectations, is one of the definitions, as Peter Lloyd points out, of the American cinema's classicism. Unlike the Brechtian or Marxist conception of epic theatre which is interested in defining

Art and violence: Laurent Tertzieff and Sandra Milo in Vanina Vanini

the broad general conditions of history — history as class-struggle, or the struggle of economic interests — Hollywood is characteristically concerned only with the existential predicament of the individuals involved. One notices time and again the amazingly claustrophobic atmosphere of the best war films: conditions fulfilled by the shallow snow-filled trenches of Wellman's *Battleground,* the enclosed pagoda set of Fuller's *Steel Helmet,* or the bunker surrounded by mine fields in Siegel's *Hell is for Heroes.* (The *dates* of war movies are interesting: there is only an arbitrary correspondence between the period in which they were produced and the period in which the events they are depicting were supposed to take place. Good war films are produced equally during the war, and at five or at ten or at twenty year intervals afterwards, which suggests that they should not so much be seen as historical documents intent on recording a particular episode, as in fact quite abstract and metaphorical discourses: which is only another definition of their being a genre.)

In sum, the American cinema has never pretended to analyse the political events that lead up to a given confrontation. What it does and has always done unsurpassably is to give us the feeling of actually experiencing the conditions in question: that is, as often as not, the feeling of facing death, the sense of living in extreme situations in a way that no other art form can come near to matching. This is of course an unhistorical aesthetic, presenting the subject matter in terms of an extreme contingency, that is to say, *of living in the present tense.* Its rallying cry is not the didactic "This is how it happened", but Ford's more sardonic testimony to human behaviour under extremes: "This really happened!" *(The Battle of Midway).* The intensity with which, mirroring the cinema's attributes of shock and violence, the camera relentlessly focusses upon men under duress in the best American war films (besides those already mentioned one could perhaps add *Merrill's Marauders* (Samuel Fuller, 1961), *Air Force* (1943, Howard Hawks), *Objective Burma* (Raoul Walsh, 1945) and one or two others), precludes a concomitant investigation into the political causes behind the actions depicted — causes which must be taken as read. In view of the force of what is offered, it seems pointless to ask whether this is "enough". All the same, it is perhaps only self-defence to acknowledge that the moral content of this kind of spectacle is usually mistaken for sensationalism.

The trenches in Pabst's Westfront 1918

As it happens, this is not a difficult charge to refute. The narrow hermetic quality of most of the films just mentioned encourages a formal, abstract, metaphorical use of mise-en-scene which manages to place the depicted events in their own moral context, so that the discourse does not simply show, but also comments. Mise-en-scene becomes a function of *defining limits,* that is to say of constructing a system within which meaning becomes possible. Thus, far from being merely sensational, war movies are capable of using symbolism as a distancing device in a very economical way indeed, without falling into the vague generalising humanism which is Allegory. But one would want to stress the importance of a *realistic depiction of events* over and above all this. A film like Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (since it has been mentioned previously) has in fact very little use for symbolism. There is no nexus of objects to attach that symbolism to. The mobile quality of the camera-work precludes the static, framing point of reference so necessary for mise-en-scene. There is almost no characterization, no central figures in whom the audience can identify a moral focus. Instead, entire reels of the film are taken up with the camera roving backwards and forwards over dark muddy trenches, while shells explode haphazardly sending up showers of mud and scree. There is practically no human movement visible; just occasionally infantrymen of one or the other sides are seen emerging or retreating into the gloom. The resolution is as schematic as the opening shots and offers very little fundamental coherence. The film is altogether bleak, stark and extraordinary, surprisingly reticent of any explicit message about brotherhood or pacifism (unlike some of his subsequent movies, eg the more celebrated *Kameradschaft).* Such Expressionist elements as there are are limited to the final reel and consist of the hero's losing his mind through shell-shock ("hysteria" being a characteristic trope of Expressionism), and the accusatory end title which implies that everything might happen like this again. How is the film so effective? How is it so intelligent? The primitive sound recording equipment which keeps dialogue to a minimum rescues the movie from the literary verbosity of contemporary Expressionist playwrights like Toller and Hasenklaver (not to mention the more traditional ineptitudes of an English equivalent like R.C. Sherriff's "Journey's End"). But even more than this there is the question of a basic realism, fundamentally unamenable to the theatre. The muffled roar of exploding shells on the sound track is not only the definitive reply to so much literary soul-searching — a kind of disdainful retort to the verbal over-kill of stage-productions. It is also the very drama of realism. Taken together with the authenticity of the battle sequences it suggests how vital it is in the cinema to get the detailing right, or in other words to *render* the represented spectacle. By making it as concrete and accurate as possible — that is, for a start, by *taking it out of doors* — the whole literary tendency of staged drama to sink into some abstract thesis (such as "The Theatre of the Absurd") is triumphantly avoided.

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Pabst's film can be taken because it it stands schematically at a crucial conjuncture, not so much in his own career (although he had dabbled in Expressionism in past movies) as in that of the cinema as a whole, whereby with the coming of sound one finds the dominance of film as a *non-abstract art-form* became finally accepted. If the talents of avant-garde artists and designers continued to be used, it was in the service of a cinema anchored — unlike modern painting, to give the obvious contrast — to an ethic of realism. The question of what at this period cinema appropriated from literary and artistic models of the avant-garde (at its most schematic, the question of what America took from Europe) is extremely interesting and deserves fuller study in terms of a kind of clandestine history of the artform which would uncover some of the problems ignored in the published histories. Lotte Eisner's book, now many years old, about the influence of Expressionism in the cinema contents itself with pointing to the better known instances and limiting herself to a European context, whereas it is obvious that even before the influx of craftsmen from the German cinema into America in the early thirties, Hollywood was permeated at all sorts of different levels by a kind of heightened,

Defeat on the battlefield ... Senso

expressive realism. That this stopped short of being "avant-garde", of slipping over into the abstract, finds a very schematic testimony in the career of Fritz Lang, where the contrast between *Metropolis* (1926, Germany) and his first American film *Fury* only ten years later couldn't be more illustrative. The development of cinema at this period can best be seen as a pragmatic taking from Expressionism all that it finds useful, while at the same time turning to good-natured ridicule the more pretentious aspects of its aesthetic doctrine. (Films as different as *Twentieth Century* and *The Band Wagon* use this process as a theme for some very fine comedy). What remained constant was the commitment to a certain inextinguishable element of verisimilitude which these notes have been attempting to comment on.

■

"History in the cinema": Bazin's essential naivety, which one can see in retrospect is the consequence of a theological outlook, was to read into American cinematic realism (which he did so much to define) a transcendant view of history whereby meaning simply gives itself up, like those epiphanies which infuse the banal contingency of everyday existence with heightened significance.

In the meantime, it left the way open for the defenders of montage to delegate to themselves the privilege of championing a rather more materialist view of history. According to Bazin's prescription, — elaborated in his analyses of Renoir, Rossellini, Welles etc — cinema functioned by simply waiting round passively for meaning to emerge — that is to say, by setting up the conditions where it *could* emerge, like a photographer waiting to get a snap of a rare animal. In contrast to this, the champions of montage thought they had little difficulty in demonstrating that it is the cinema itself in its multiplicity of codes which *makes* meaning. Debate like this in as often as not simply the rationalization of temperamental preferences (first finding the kind of film one likes and then constructing a theory round it,) but it seems to me in this case that both sides were wrong. The defenders of montage, for arrogating to themselves one of those mythical *correct ways* of depicting history (a kind of aesthetic equivalent to a crude form of marxism); and the defenders of neo-realism, (quite apart from their belief in the divine provenance of history which must presumably remain untested), who are equally at fault for insisting on the demonstrably false equivalence of cinema, in its spatial, temporal incarnation, to "real life".

The purpose of saying this is to re-stress the principle that though the cinema owes everything that is worthwhile in it to its emancipation from the theater, its formal basis is still over and above everything intensely *theatrical.* The critical distance which, insinuated into the discourse, this theatrical element provides should serve to prevent even the most forlorn "Bazinian" from mistaking the cinema for reality. Nothing is easier to demonstrate in even the most classical examples of mise-en-scene that a high premium is placed on realism only to re-introduce, side by side as it were an extremely abstract, even melodramatic notion of theatricality: "I am interested in this theatrical aspect. Already in *Le Petit Soldat,* the more I was trying to discover the concrete, the closer I came to the theatre" (Godard). As has been suggested, it is the very consequence of rhythm (functioning as shock) to introduce into the most hackneyed scenario an element of rupture. The foreshortening of time scales in the surge of narrative mimics the function of editing as *cutting* and *distortion.* In addition, the enclosed action of Hollywood drama, and the rigour with which mise-en-scene — lighting, camera angles, close-ups, etc. — is deployed has a way of making the discourse metaphorical, stylized, schematic. (Think of some of the war films mentioned: the perpetual night-time sequences in Donald Siegel's *Hell is for Heroes* becomes, by an imperceptible metaphorical gradation, the literal Hell of the title; similarly, the blinding white snow in Wellman's *Battleground* which surrounds the stranded American platoon functions as a kind of threatening shroud, hovering around the oblong trenches which the G.I.'s have dug themselves into — which in turn are registered by the camera angles they are shot from as the potential graves of the platoon.) For many people the American cinema only comes alive with the realisation that its signs are prodigiously formal and symmetrical — whether it is *Johnny Guitar* or *Strangers on a Train* which provides the revelation. In anything as tightly compact as Hollywood drama — the result of paring everything that impedes the narrative flow — the least contrast is going to acquire a formal significance, even the contrast between indoor and outdoor sequences. One could speak of a highly abstract dialectic which is set in motion by the difference between "lit", studio-bound interiors — poised, measured, perhaps somewhat stilted — and the "realistic" outside action sequences which function on a totally different level (a footnote here for the auteur debate: the importance of the *2nd unit director).* War films again give us some of the best examples of this. To stay with the films already mentioned: the closing reels of Fuller's *Steel Helmet* offer an extraordinarily schematic contrast between the still, hieratic, densely metaphorical set of the Pagoda (a refuge where the American soldiers are holding out), used by Fuller with great skill to suggest a complex moral universe, and the violent, contingent, rapidly cutting shots of the anonymous Korean troops as they begin to attack. Hawks goes further in *Air Force* (1943) to include large sections of newsreel footage for shots of American aircraft bombarding the Japanese fleet; these are formally in distinct contrast to the hermetic, studio-constructed cockpit sequences which have taken up the rest of the film. Pabst's *Westfront 1918* for all the "realism" of its front-line sequences contains an episode in which one of the characters returns home to find his wife has been unfaithful to him, so awkwardly performed, with such melodramatic solemnity as to make the contrast seem in retrospect almost a desired effect — as if a director like Straub had set it up purely in terms of a formal experiment. (See, for instance, Straub's use of similar scenes in *The Bridegroom, The Actress and the Pimp.* Pabst's movie is already adapted from a novel, which is what is behind those stilted, romanesque stage conventions for the interior sequences).

Just as enclosed indoor episodes photographed in a certain way acquire a metaphorical resonance, so practically do exteriors. Although in the anonymous

outdoors there may appear to be no specific objects to pin these extra layers of meaning onto, the fact remains that landscape is already metaphorical. We bring to its contemplation the knowledge of a whole history of ways it has previously been represented, in myth and in painting, a coherent iconography which the development of cinema was itself to do much to enrich. Thus when American cinema for the first time for hundreds of years in staged spectacle took history out of doors, it was into a landscape that already vibrated with connotations and myths. In fact such is the force in Western culture of a sense of lost paradise, that any depiction of landscape (that is, where it is not simply the background for events that are otherwise unrelated) is almost bound to carry with it as a residual ideological element the sense of loss. As landscape becomes myth, history becomes nostalgia. Thus, where landscape is the "subject" of the movie in question, as it is in the bold and, as it were, overdetermined canvases presented in a genre like the Western, the view of history that can be extracted will tend to be conservative: lurid — but conservative, like the flaming orange sunsets of Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. For all the physical distance covered by the different landscapes of Ford, Boetticher or Mann, they operate in fact as closed systems, a self enclosed "moral universe" which can take an oblique and ambiguous stance towards the development of history. Myth, like nostalgia, is supposed to be timeless. So are the rigid, formalised conventions of the Western's endless *pageant of violence*.

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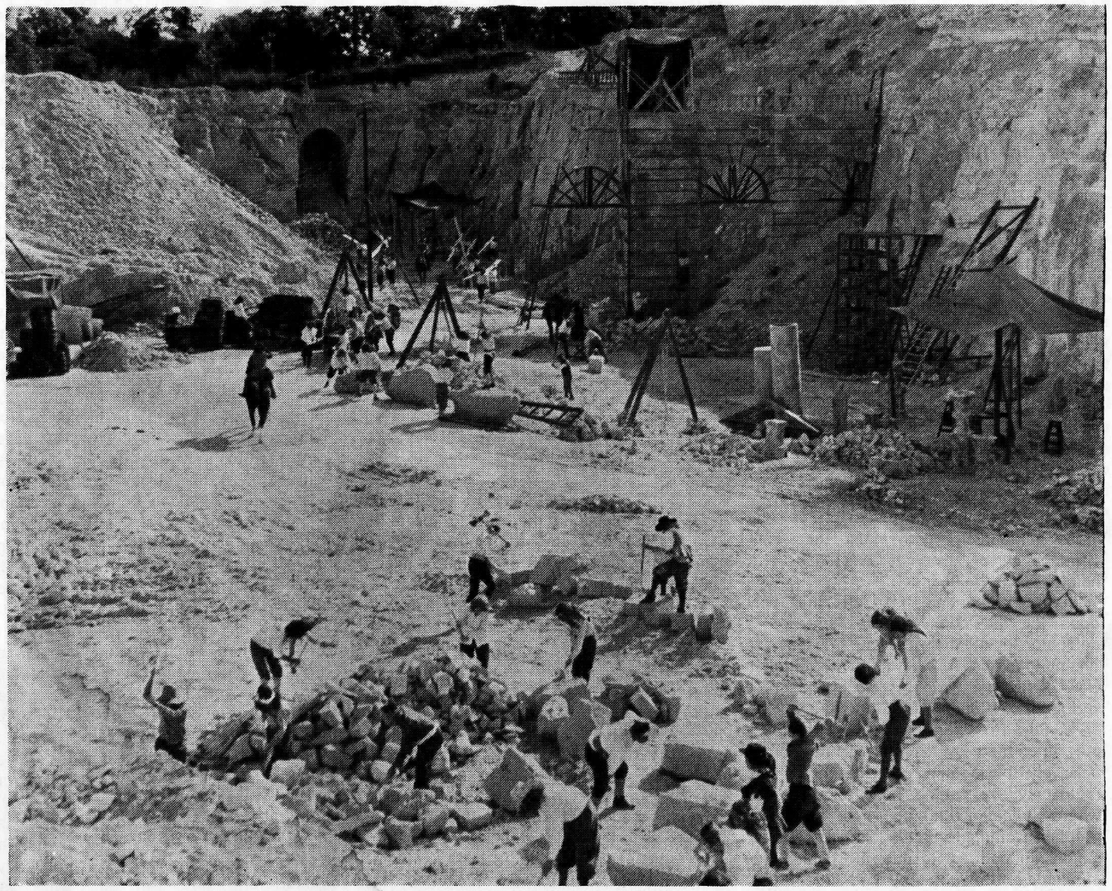
Pageant: *spectacle*. Whether the emphasis in a given movie is on history or myth (the difference, say, between a Ford and a Hawks western), the irreducible element of spectacle serves to remind us that its "message" will be formalised as *gesture*. The so-called "stupidity" of cinema (to its detractors) comes from failing to recognise the essentially visual character of mise-en-scene, and seeking to re-instate instead the hegemony of plot (guarantee of literary accountability). Spectacle in this context is the liberation from tragedy — the tragedy whose ideological function Nietzsche originally criticised as "emetic". (Note: this is not the same thing as saying that the cinema has no room for pathos. It is exactly that purged of the metaphysical elements of the western tradition of drama, the cinema recreates the conditions in which pathos can once more operate.) Spectacle here becomes a kind of *asceticism* — as it is is in the best westerns — so that a salient comparison might be between Dreyer's rigorously silent screen dramatisation and Shaw's windy, verbiose stage version of the trial of St Joan (1928 and 1924 respectively). Austerity in spectacle sounds a paradoxical attribute, and it may come as a surprise to anyone who has read these notes so far as an argument for the intrinsically flamboyant quality of the medium. Yet it is an essential aspect of the aesthetic intelligence of such directors of historical spectacle as Mizoguchi and Rossellini that the hyperbolic *expansiveness of gesture* on the part of their actors is held within a practise of mise-en-scene whose suave immaculacy is a conduct of reticence. It is the very patience of their tracking shots! — or the care with which the succeeding episodes of the drama are made to unfold as so many "cameos". It is the intelligence of musical punctuation, no less than the assured placing of fades and dissolves. (In a word, there is nothing intrinsically stupid about spectacle: its success or failure depends as it has always done on those qualities of taste and judgement which are in the last resort beyond the reach of detailed critical analysis. Thus it is an intuition about form rather than content that separates *Senso* from *The Night Porter,* or the films of Makavejev from the films of Ken Russell.) European and Japanese cinema's staging of history, then, shares this interesting mixture of

The lens of history... construction of Versailles from Rossellini's Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV



realism and formality. The combination of a large scale realistic canvas — meticulously shot battle scenes, deployment of a large army of extras and so on — with a poised, ordered mise-en-scene to advance the narrative can produce an aesthetic, gestural view of history, the sense of *history as stage* (where the final scenes culminate on the scaffold!) particularly suitable for dealing with periods which have a strong, often factitious sense of pageant. Thus operatic view of history has a long tradition in the Italian cinema, most vividly exemplified perhaps by movies like Visconti's *Senso* or Rossellini's two dramatisations of 19th century history *Viva L'Italia* and *Vanina Vanini*. In all these films history is mediated through violent and melodramatic passion (English title of Rossellini's film: *The Betrayer)* — specifically, in two of the three movies mentioned, the moral conflict felt by a young man caught up in the events of a national uprising who is loved at the same time by an older woman (Alida Valli and Farley Granger in Visconti's film, Sandra Milo and Laurent Tertzieff in Rossellini's). The distinction of *Vanina,* to make this clear, lies in the way the scenes of heightened drama (the murder of the informer, the Countess Vitelleschi's confrontation with the young confessor, the farewell scenes in the castle, the execution of Pierre) are held up within a highly stylized, ordered framework, a kind of aesthetic *chastity* which functions to produce this curious and compelling mixture of distance on the one hand and fierce emotional vibrancy on the other. These are "operatic" movies and their relation to spectacle would be in terms of some of the distinctions already discussed: they are indeed "flamboyant" and "theatrical", and stand at the opposite end of the scale from the later Rossellini where these attributes are frozen into a kind of restrained ascesis. It is here that the cinema's capacity for realism becomes once more so interesting. At the extreme level of coolness one finds in such films as *Le Prise de Pouvoir de Louis Quatorze* the camera resumes among other things its objective or documentary function, and the spectacle of history in the *cinema* becomes the triumph of the camera's versatile and patient eye for detail. The ideological gloss on this reading is a humanist one in so far as Rossellini's preoccupations have to do with a fascination with technology, so that in a certain sense narrative itself is subordinated to the principal task of celebrating the camera's unique privilege: ie the ability to patiently reconstruct in minute detail the very texture of everyday life in past epochs. In so far as the development of technology is at all tied to the establishment of political power (the equation neatly presented in the shots of the construction of Versailles) Rossellini's interests are in mainstream history, but the same observations apply to movies whose subject matter places them on the margins of civilization and whose drama might be read — as in *L'Enfant Sauvage,* or *Hell in the Pacific* or *Savage Innocents* — as the forcible immersion of an anachronistic hero into history. It is exactly on the borders of civilization where technology encompasses the need for survival, and in the context of isolation, (the Pacific islands, the Arctic snows), that the cinema most exerts its curious and literal charm: *how* does one transport cannon and supplies on an expedition into the interior of Peru, or construct a raft large enough and stable enough to take horses? (Herzog's *Aguirre).* What are the methods of keeping warm in an igloo? (Nicholas Ray). What sort of domestic arrangements does one rig up to get an adequate supply of rainwater and how does one ensure they're best defended? (Boorman). The level of unobtrusive despatch at which these reconstructions take place — and it encompasses equally the more overtly "operatic" movies one's been considering: eg and purely at random, the sequences in the granary in Visconti's *Senso* which effortlessly accomplish both their narrative function and serve to establish (i.e. render concrete) the economic basis for the social position of the movie's protagonists — is the proof of the cinema's ability to sketch the process and movement of colonisation in its widest sense, that is, the physical and intellectual appropriation of unknown territory; it situates itself happily *on the frontier* (the western the most resilient of all genres!), as a kind of metaphor for the technical challenge of filmmaking itself, the physical objects that have to be overcome (directors as craftsmen: Hawks (engineer), Lang and Ray (architects) etc etc.) The accuracy accomplished through this is *unobtrusive* in a way that is finally impossible on the stage where, for example (from the British theatre) in the "naturalism" of standard Royal Court productions, the portrayal of *work* in any form inevitably becomes allegorical. The construction of the marquee in David Storey's "The Contractor" "wastes" the realism of Lindsay Anderson's direction since the nearer the tent gets to completion (and it is significant that this process covers the entire trajectory of the plot) the closer it comes to resembling the symbolical tower dreamed up by Ibsen's "Masterbuilder". Only in the cinema do the processes of production escape the insidious allegorization which they seem doomed to bear in literary discourse (including the theatre.) The scenes of Bach composing in Straub's *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach,* or the scenes in the suburban laundry in Renoir's *Crime of M. Lange,* or the scenes in which Itard (Truffaut) tries to teach the boy to talk in *L'Enfant Sauvage* are the speculated fulfilment of a certain utopian dream where work and leisure are presented at one and the same time *in the concrete* in a certain historical incarnation.

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The distinctions which have been made up to now have usually been designed to bring out the difference between cinema's approach to the staging of historical pageant and that of other art forms (eg opera, theatre). But there is a final distinction within the cinema itself which these notes would be incomplete without mentioning. The three examples given at the end of the last section all come from the European cinema, but they are unusual in doing so. With one or two exceptions, — notably, of course, Rossellini — European "art" cinema is not a cinema of history. Its overwhelming concentration, if one were to attempt to pin down its ideology, has been on "human problems", subsumed in a kind of universalist category: Olmi, Jancso, Bergman, Truffaut and more recently Tanner and Goretta operate a cinema of close-up which aims to catch the minute details of human behaviour at their most natural, translating them into categories of pathos or tenderness or pain (see the review of Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* in Monogram no. 5). Only recently has the concept of spectacle in European cinema become firmly directed towards history, so that for instance the "mythological" bias of Italian cinema during the 60's (Pasolini's allegorical theorems and pigsties, Fellini's monstrous Satyricon) has now become harnessed to a much more explicitly historical investigation of fascism. (Not so much an investigation perhaps, more a perspective — as *Roma* gives way to *Amarcord* and the Italian cinema is swamped with directors returning to their regional roots to chronicle the history of the land and the peasantry.)

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All this has perhaps something of a naivety about it. There is something of a rush to get in on the job; it is as if for the first time after years of "humanist" enterprise history in Europe is being *discovered* as a potential topic for the medium of film. Spectacle is here the spectacle of flesh and "decadence", as following the course set by market demands the chronicling of fascism coincides with the increasingly explicit sexual discourse now allowed in the cinema. Fascism and fashion: with the exception of a forceful and original movie like Makavejev's *WR: Mysteries of the Organism,* these films fall victim to what one can only call a *B.B.C. approach* to historical drama which has the costume department and the decor scrupulously correct, but whose repertoire of narrative ruses and formal devices to put the story over are disarmingly derivative: the operatic panache of cinematic spectacle commented on earlier on in these notes becomes too literally a descent into overblown grand opera *(The Damned; The Night Porter);* while the cinema's ability to manipulate eroticism *conceptually,* degenerates into the weight of pathos placed on a series of supiciously blond and beautiful blue-eyed heroines (whose "jewishness" might be their least obvious attribute: consider Charlotte Rampling in *The Night Porter;* Dominique Sanda in *The Conformist* and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis,* Aurore Clément in *Lacombe Lucien,* or even poor Marisa Berenson in *Cabaret*. Obviously in all these cases what is important is their *aristocratic* vulnerability.)

By contrast the American cinema has always been the popular art form which par excellence constructs past and present

Elliott Gould and George Segal in California Split

simultaneously; which writes itself historically, as Lukacs claimed the novel was able to do in the time of Balzac. It is an art form of the present tense. Hollywood's formal dynamics — its vigour, concision and pace — have been so many ways in which melodrama from its beginnings has externalised (made public, made articulate) the energy and anger of its beleaguered and proletarian heroes (Cagney, Bogart, Douglas, McQueen), transforming that formal drive into social comment. The function of narrative in American pictures is exactly to translate the inner pulsion of these men into formal and graspable signs by giving it a goal. Thus it provides so to speak the framework in which the asceticism of *gesture* can be substituted for that abundance of *speech* now reified beyond salvaging into literary and class contingencies. The "discovery" over the last ten years of Sirk and Fuller and other directors like them has been largely the discovery of this *secret discourse* which although not exactly subversive (the word has too mandarin and cultivated a connotation: Bunuel is "subversive") is nevertheless the clue on the level of form to these movies' ambiguous message. They are disquieting where they *should* be conformist, intransigent where they *seem* to offer the easy option (hence, for all the earnest posturing that follows from too literal an application, psychoanalysis — as in the famous Cahiers dissection of *Young Mr Lincoln* — is in fact a good metaphor for their general method of interpretation).

But now the American cinema is becoming retrospective, and restaging recent past social history as avidly as the Europeans. The loss of confidence in the way things are going at present politically, is a signal to re-examine the roots of the disaster in the past; or, if not to examine them, to forget them in the revisionist history which forgives everything by seeing it through the eyes of a child. The numb, dull stubborn inarticulacy of the heroes of the 50's, Brando and James Dean, whose revolt was "fashioned" and given direction inside a tight and coherent notion of mise-en-scene, structured, symbolic, translatable, has become a kind of passive and ironic aimlessness, symbolised by the hysterical five minute burst of laughter of a Randy McQuaid in *The Last Detail,* or else the kind of stoned, endlessly inarticulate verbalising one gets in Robert Altman's movies, where the fragmentation of American society is seen not so much in terms of a hero, but, literally, in the promiscuous chance encounters of the crowd: (the "underworld" no longer inhabited exclusively by gangsters, but by a whole assorted fauna of thieves, whores, hippies, religious freaks, ordinary people, everyone who doesn't hold a 9 to 5 job. The beautiful, wry crowd scenes of Altman, Peckinpah, Mazursky, Nicholson...) The "retrospective" in American cinema excuses the mess of the present by invoking a duped innocence of the past, like the inarticulate children in Terrence Malick's *Badlands* who give themselves up so artlessly, figuring that their reign of terror may as well end when they run out of petrol. The hesitant, aleatory, improvised acting one finds here and in so many recent American films is the stylistic equivalent of a difference about responsibility which from Shakespeare to Chekhov has always focussed itself on the question of age, and which here can be symbolised by nothing so much as Jack Nicholson's angst-ridden mumblings at the beginning of *The King of Marvin Gardens.* With the middle aged against the young (as in Malick's film) or in strange complicity with them (other films by or connected with Jack Nicholson like *Easy Rider* and *Drive He Said,* or Sam Peckinpah, notably in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid,* or the John Huston of *Fat City),* the spectacle of history is presented for all its dangerousness as a calculated "spree", as a kind of dumb and violent odyssey which never gets anywhere. A sardonic view of history as "failed lives". Elsewhere it is a *night to remember* where the adolescent hero gets drunk or gets laid, a last night of innocence before the daylight of history and the subsequent unsettling events of the last twenty years force themselves on his consciousness (see for example the sense of bewildered regret that marks *The Last Detail, American Graffiti, The Last Picture Show).* Commemorated by the music of the period, an endless chorus of folk and rock of the 50's and 60's, the hero aims to lose himself in a kind of cencentrated zeal, like the shuddering shoulders of James Taylor as he forces his car through the gears in the closing shots of *Two Lane Blacktop,* while the screen blisters into oblivion (it is the definition of epiphany to be timeless). The events of the 60's (preeminently the history of America's increasing involvement in Vietnam), which signalled for someone like Godard the necessary withdrawal of support and endorsement of the American cinema, offered no such easy solution to the indigenous group of American directors just beginning to make a career for themselves, who on the contrary were forced to go back to their adolescence, in the late 40's and 50's, as a means of exploring both the phemomenon of Hollywood, and what could be made of it now.

Well, astonishingly, and this continues to provide food for thought for the many ways in which politics can be assimilated into art, the commercial cinema — a cinema of taste, intelligence and genuine popular appeal — continues to prosper in the United States, its political message neither simplified into allegory nor agitprop, but nestling clandestinely as it has always done in an essential strength of observation — that egregious texture of realism which these notes have attempted to stress. *Drive He Said, Junior Bonner, Two Lane Blacktop, California Split, American Graffiti:* minor enough movies in their way but just for that reason representative of the amazing fertility and inventiveness which continues to be the hallmark of American pictures and their impressive assurance.

Pageants of violence: action, movement, gesture. Above all gesture. History itself preserved as the miraculous attribute of cinema. Men bathing off the edge of the ship they are building in Eisenstein's *Strike* (a moment in Russian history before industry and leisure are divorced); a woman orator berating the assembled "Amis de la Constitution" in Renoir's *La Marseillaise* (a moment in which history as speech, mime and expressiveness is still the property of the people and not of the demagoue: in other words a film about eloquence); a partisan being shot dead as he retreats through the marshes in Rossellini's *Paisa;* a confrontation of cultures in Ford's *The Searchers.* Battles, routs, victories. The cinema's external canvas; its scope, size and versatility; its disregard for literary and class stereotypes. Strange mixture of taste and vulgarity: its violence and intelligence. Cinematic *spectacle.*

Mark Le Fanu

notes on the unmotivated hero

the pathos of failure: american films in the 70's

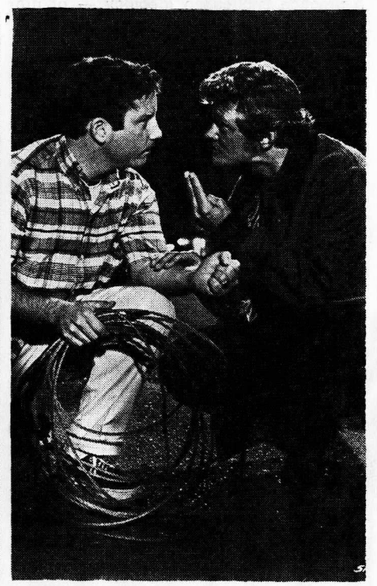
Looking at *Thieves Like Us* and remembering *They Live By Night,* wanting to compare *Jeremiah Johnson* with *Run of the Arrow,* or thinking of *The Naked Spur* when watching *Deliverance* may simply be the typical pastime of someone who has seen too many movies; nonetheless the similarities are also another reminder of how faithful the American cinema is to its basic themes. One can safely venture, for instance, that the new Hollywood of Altman, Pollack, Boorman, of Rafelson, Hellman, Spielberg or Ashby is as fond of mapping out journeys as were the films of Ray, Fuller or Anthony Mann in the 50s. And yet, it is equally evident that this motif has nowadays less of a thematic or dynamic function: journeys are no longer the same drive-and goal-oriented moral trajectories as they were. And although still serving as an oblique metaphor of the archetypal American experience, they seem to foreground themselves and assume the blander status of a narrative device, sometimes a picaresque support for individual scenes, situations and setpieces, another time the ironically admitted pretext to keep the film moving. One wonders whether *Two Lane Blacktop, Five Easy Pieces, The Last Detail, California Split* (to name but a few) will come to be seen as apt examples of a shift, no doubt historically significant, that makes the existential themes of one generation of filmmakers no more than reference points to be quoted by the next - and to be used perhaps in order to scaffold a cautious, but differently constructed architecture of film narrative. If the themes remain the same, the attitudes and thereby the forms could not be more different, and there is evidence, it seems to me, that in some of the films mentioned an aspect of experimentation is hidden, of the kind familiar only from the masters of the classical mise-en-scene and the cinematically literate European directors. What follows is an attempt to speculate in what sense even commercial American films might be considered 'experimental'.

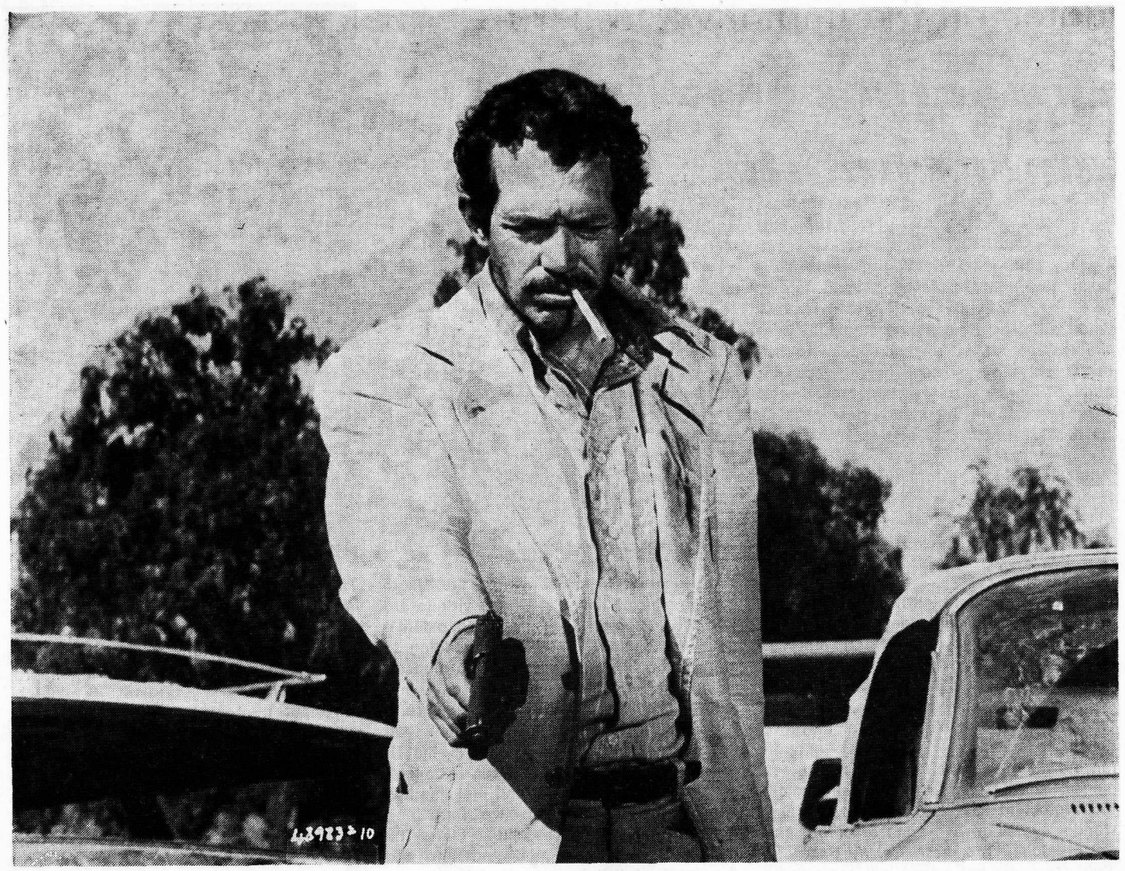
The perversity of the enterprise must be admitted from the start. Not only is my choice of films selective, the argument fastens on an element that seems excessively esoteric in the context of the American cinema of the 70s, whose virtues are its down-to-earth realism, its unostentatious detachment, while still managing to convey the customary accuracy of observation, the palpable physical presence and emotional resonance of spectacle and action. All the same, the significant feature of this new liberal cinema is that it makes an issue of the motives — or lack of them — in its heroes, and that this has implications on the narrative form and thereby on how one sees these films. The combination of the unmotivated hero and the motif of the journey, that is, the recourse to a motivation, ready-made, highly conventionalized and brought to the film from outside would appear to indicate a kind of malaise already frequently alluded to in relation to the European cinema — the fading confidence in being able to tell a story. But is it in fact the same thing as the self-conscious awareness of the status of fiction so noticeable in Chabrol or Bunuel?

The trope of innocence: Shelley Duval in Thieves Like Us

To put the problem in perspective: it will be remembered that the so-called classical narrative was essentially based on a dramaturgy of intrigue and strongly accentuated plot, which managed to transform spatial and temporal sequence into consequence, a continuum of cause and effect. The image or scene not only pointed forward and backward to what had been and what was to come, but also helped to develop a motivational logic that functioned as an implicit causality. Whether Hichcock thriller or Hawks comedy, one was secure in the knowledge that the scenes fitted into each other like cogwheels in a clockwork, and that all visual

Dawn after a night to remember... situating the present by a backward-looking glance in George Lucas's American Graffiti





A hero with no past to romanticise: Warren Oates in Bring Me The Head Of Alfredo Garcia

information was purposive, inflected towards a plenitude of significance, saturated with clues that explained motivation and character. Out of conflict, contradiction and contingency the narrative generated order, linearity, and articulated energy. Obviously, at a deeper level, such a practice implies an ideology — of progress, of forging in the shape of the plot the outlines of a cultural message. The dramaturgy on the other hand, posited heroes who were psychologically or morally motivated: they had a case to investigate, a name to clear, a woman (or man) to love, a goal to reach. Ideological critics have therefore detected in the classical cinema a fundamentally affirmative attitude to the world it depicts, a kind of a-priori optimism located in the very structure of the narrative about the usefulness of positive action. Contradictions were resolved and obstacles overcome by having them played out in dramatic-dynamic terms or by personal initiative: whatever the problem, one can *do* something about it.

Such implicit didacticism is less easy to find in those films of the 70s that pick up the motif of the journey. On the contrary, the off-hand way it is usually introduced specifically neutralizes goal-directedness and warns one not to expect an affirmation of purposes and meanings. Taking to the road comes to stand for the very quality of contingency, and a film like *Two Lane Blacktop* is symptomatic in this respect: there is only the merest shadow of an intrigue, the action provocatively avoids the interpersonal conflicts potentially inherent both in the triangular relationship and in the challenge personified by the Warren Oates characters, and finally, the film toys with goals (the race to Washington) in an almost gratuitous way. On this level, Hellman has made, and doubtless intended, an anti-action film, deliberately playing down an intrigue that might goad the spectator into involvement or a plot that could generate a psychologically motivated causality.

Hellman is not alone in this. The change I think one can detect is that the affirmative-consequential model of narrative is gradually being replaced by another, whose precise nature is yet to be determined. This is why the films I'm here interested in have a transitional status. Their liberal outlook, their unsentimental approach to American society makes them reject affirmation on the level of ideology, a rejection which has rendered problematic the dramaturgy and film-language developed within the context of an affirmative culture. But the changes have also something to do with the altered conditions of production. Television not only affected the economic structures of film-making, it also left ideologically less representative groups in the cinemas. And since independent producers and directors are now (more relentlessly than in the days when a studio could cushion even a string of failures) under pressure to adequate their films to the ideological assumptions of prospective audiences, it is not surprising to find films reflect stances of dissent typical among minority groups. Compared with the 40s and 50s, the commercial cinema has such a tenuous economic hold over its audiences that it is in practice forced to seek them out, capture them either by an intensity of emotional involvement that is unavailable to television — a dramaturgy of suspense, spectacle and violence — or by anticipation of favoured emotional anti-stances, such as cynicism, or the detached cool of a certain *machismo*. Cop-thrillers or disaster-movies cater for the first type, road-movies with rebels as heroes are a useful outlet for the second.

The problem that emerges from seeing recent American films is that directors seem a little unsure of how to objectify into narrative the mood of indifference, the post-rebellious lassitude which they, rightly or wrongly, assume to predominate in their audiences. The trend where it is not towards the defiantly asserted lack of direction, as in the road-movies, manifests itself in stories that do not have a plot and in situations that have a kind of negative, self-demolishing dynamic. For in one sense, the American cinema still understands itself as metaphoric — a film that is not simply feeding off the genres of the 50s and its affirmative structures intends to convey (like much of the best American fiction) a central image that can stand for the present state of America: the tension betwen existential allegory and documentary naturalism is as strong as ever. Thus, one finds favoured locations that convey such overtones — the open prison in *Sugarland Express* or *The Mean Machine*, the dance hall on an ocean pier of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They*, the movie house of *The Last Picture Show*. What the heroes bring to such films is the almost physical sense of inconsequential action, of pointlessness and uselessness, a radical scepticism, in short, about the American virtues of ambition, vision, drive.

This becomes the more evident if one looks at what one might call the 'conservative' films of the '70s — the cop-thriller, for instance, which presents a desublimated version of the moralized violence and of the drive-orientated hero that used to be found in the films of the 50s. Whereas the neurotic streak in this tradition — the Cagney character of *White Heat*, the Fuller or Ray hero blemished by uncontrollable violence *(Shock Corridor, On Dangerous Ground, In A Lonely Place)* had either an anarchic grace in his romantic hubris or a moral complexity of compulsion and motivation that made him symbolic of the contradiction in the American ideal of vitality, the Clint Eastwood or Charles Bronson characters *(Dirty Harry, Death Wish)*, who are so purposive and determined, so firm and single-minded, appear powered by the purely negative energy of resentment, frustration, and a petty-bourgeois spite seeking to vent its destructive rage under the guise of a law-and-order morality. The over-determined heroes featured in excessive, violent plots are the reverse side of the unmotivated heroes in the liberal films: both typify the predicament of the commercial cinema of audience-orientation when it is attempting to represent in narrative-dramatic form the contradictions in American society and thus trying to be 'realistic'. But if violence, whether physical or emotional, is the defensive gesture of the self-alienated individual in a society he does not understand and over which he has no control, then the affirmative model of the cop thriller, and all other forms of strongly dramatized narratives, are evidently unrealistic, subjective, a compensatory reflex. The image of the non-committed hero, on the other hand, the guy who keeps his cool (who seems at first wholly depoliticised and subjective) might well be the vehicle of a perspective from which American society can be seen more analytically.

The stony faced Bronson in Death Wish

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One finds such an attempt to create an objective realism in the type of hero depicted by actors like Jack Nicholson *(Five Easy Pieces)*, James Taylor *(Two Lane Blacktop)*, Warren Beatty *(The Parallax View)* or Elliot Could *(California Split)*. But a cinema that could be considered progressive in this context would have to be more than symptomatic: one would be looking for signs that the director had thematized in the very structure of the narrative an awareness of the problem. The question comes down to how the scepticism about motives and justification in the hero, and the doubt about an experience of social and political life where reality is pasted over by ideological fictions, are translated into a formal search for a film narrative free from the parasitic and synthetic causality of a dramaturgy of conflict. On the other hand, is there a mode of representation that validates the real without encasing it in the categories of the symbolic and the spectacular? In other words, one is asking for a mise-en-scene that can differentiate, can take a critical stance. What evidence is there today that the liberal film is finding an appropriate mise-en-scene?

Warren Oates and Isela Vega in Alfredo Garcia

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Among the directors whose involvement with the dynamic-affirmative model dates back to the 50s and early 60s, Aldrich and Peckinpah (both of whom have a more than casual interest in 'violence') show most clearly that they are affected by the crisis of motivation. *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* is an interesting study (within the now familiar Peckinpah thematic) of a hero who has no past to romanticise (as in

The Wild Bunch, or Junior Bonner) and who is thus more radically unmotivated than any previous Peckinpah character. When he does find a cause, it is made clear that to Benny (Warren Oates) the use of violence comes almost as a form of moral rearmament, ambiguous but devoutly desired as such violence always is in Peckinpah (cf. *The Straw Dogs)*. However, in *Alfredo Garcia* Peckinpah is both fascinated by a zero-degree of motivation and yet too sentimentally attached to the apocalypse to conceive of any narrative other than a cathartic one.

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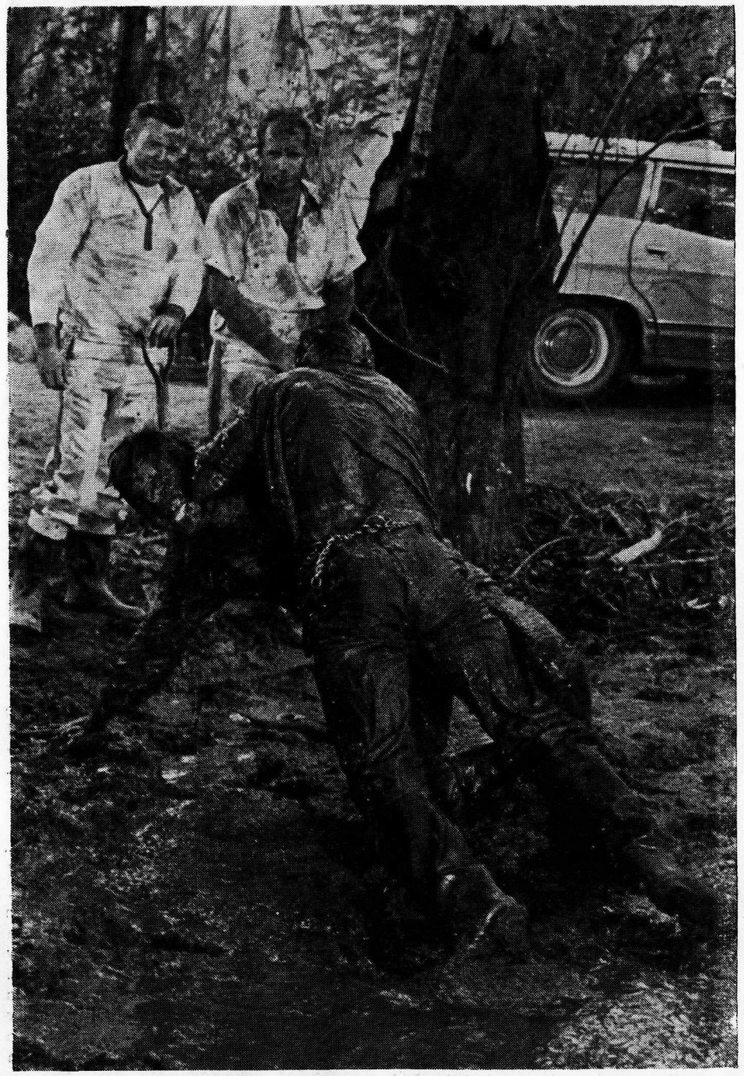
Lack of motivation is even more explicitly the subject of Aldrich's *The Mean Machine,* a movie whose complex narrative conception appears in the realization more awkward than elegant. It is as if Aldrich, as much in desperation as disgust, had broken his film into several disjointed pieces, and one can unscramble at least three strands pushed into each other. In the first, the Burt Reynolds character gets out of bed, savagely mauls his girl, drives her sports-car across a half-opened bridge-leaf, dumps it in the river and then stands at the bar waiting for the cops to pick him up. The violence is excessive, the motivation non-existent. One feels that neither movie nor hero can go in any direction whatsoever, and one wonders whether one has seen the last 15 minutes of the previous film, or the pre-credit scene to a flash-back movie that never follows. What does follow is another film which superficially belongs to the time-honoured genre of the prison film, where the hero rehabilitates himself by organizing the sports team, turning anti-social convicts into loyal team-mates. Aldrich twists the genre out of shape, and the rehabilitation does not mean release, but converts the sentence into an indefinite one. However, the real twist is that inside the second film is a third one, which by rights is not a movie at all, but a saturday-afternoon tv — baseball game complete with PA-man and cheerleaders. The suspense is accordingly puerile, and one suspects that Aldrich is giving (by default?) an object lesson about the impossibility of making dramatic films: unmotivated heroes, morally bogus genres, infantile audiences — three times he is showing us drama without consequence, three variations on one theme. A stretch of dialogue midway through the film verbalizes the situation once more: we know there is something obscure in the hero's past that concerns his motivation. His friend keeps asking 'why did you do it?'. Finally, Burt Reynolds gives an explanation, a sob-story belonging to the conventions of the rehabilitation genre, but before we have recovered from its painful pathos, Burt Reynolds starts to grin and admits that he has been having his friends on, and that he just doesn't know why he 'did' it — maybe just for the money.

Emptiness of energy and gesture... Aldrich's The Mean Machine



Clearly, in Aldrich's film, the salient fact is that whatever was important, the determining events happened long ago, and this in itself is a telling metaphor of the film's motivational predicament: if characters have no moral history that can plausibly explain their behaviour, action is the spectacle of gratuitousness. (What makes disaster movies positively archaic in the light of this is that they necessarily assume that the catastrophe is still about to happen, and that all it needs to be prepared is to rehearse it.)

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A more familiar form of self-consciousness than that practised by Aldrich is to resort to adaptation, parody, pastiche: Bogdanovitch, Altman, Polanski. *Chinatown,* a poker-faced pastiche of the *film noir* is nonetheless as contemptuous of its hero as Altman is in *The Long Goodbye,* except that Polanski's fury about having no story to tell, and yet wanting to tell it well, appeases itself in the meticulous craftsmanship of the reconstruction. Altman's parodies *(The Long Goodbye)* and reprises *(Thieves Like Us)* would appear to mark him out as the director with the most 'European' sense of fictional impasses, remiscent in fact of the Godard and Truffaut films of the mid-60s. In *Thieves Like Us* the heroes listen as compulsively to radio-shows and want to read about themselves as avidly in the newspapers as the heroes of *Band A Part* or *Baisers Volées* were caught in the seductively narcissistic mirror of the 'romanesque'. Altman, possibly taking his cue from Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde,* develops the mythopoeic magic of the American cinema's own past through the double mythomania of newspaper and radio-serial, but then, choosing a '30s setting, is he not himself helping to build up a myth? I don't think so: the movie wants to impress by its unromantic, anti-glamourizing sobriety, and it is as much anti-*Bonnie and Clyde* as in another way it is anti-*They Live By Night.*

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What is interesting is that Altman is one of the few modern directors who still occasionally employ a symbolic language that clearly belongs to the epoch of the classical mise-en-scene: the symbolization of objects through thematic use in the narrative. One would have thought that it belongs too obviously to a cinema of purposive development and positive meanings to be of use in any other form than as quotations. *Thieves Like Us* features a patchwork quilt that is given all the grand rhetorical orchestration that Shirley MacLaine's "sweetheart" pillow had in Minnelli's *Some Came Running* (a film whose symbolic objects Godard remembers in both *Le Mépris* and *Pierrot Le Fou)*. Kechie's patchwork quilt is symbolically charged in an early scene when she covers the injured Bowie and then slips under it herself when they make love for the first time. The importance of the quilt is emphasized when she explains that it was made by her grandmother and is her sole personal possession and evidence of her family. It then reappears when the two have their decisive quarrel and has its thematic apotheosis when Bowie, now a corpse riddled by police bullets, is wrapped up in it and dumped, mud- and blood-spattered, into a puddle. The price Altman pays for using such obvious dramatic symbolism is a stylized poignancy rather too overt not to disrupt the sombre, unemphatic ending, but it is in line with other formal devices (the repetition of the line from Romeo and Juliet, for instance), whereby Altman seems unsure just how self-consciously he can treat the genre he has chosen to imitate.

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The penchant for pathos, however, goes deeper. "We blew it": one remembers the resigned and melancholy admission of Captain America. For all its traditionalist plot elements and stylistic uncertainties, *Easy Rider* still functions along with *Bonnie and Clyde* as the only popular and successful alternatives to the affirmative stance. Not just because it is a film about heroes without a goal who take 'drive' out of the psychic and onto the road, and who take 'trip' off the road and into the mind, but also as a paradigm of the open-ended loose-structured narrative, so frequently imitated since. The heroes are still motivated, though, for thematically *Easy Rider* revives the ever-present motif in American culture about the male couple ganging up to escape civilization and women. In fact, the double male lead still predominates (from *Midnight Cowboy, Butch Cassidy..., The Sting* down to *California Split* and *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot)* and has become a genre for both conformist and drop-out attitudes. The permutations reach from Ashby's *The Last Detail* to Spielberg's *Sugarland Express,* the latter particularly interesting, because a Bonnie and Clyde type story ends up as the sentimental love-story of the all-male couple, when the young policeman taken hostage befriends and is in turn befriended by the boy whom we know from the start to be a very reluctant acomplice in his wife's hi-jack trip to recover her baby.

Over all the movies that take to the road on quests that are escapes and escapes that are quests, there hangs like a haze the sweet poignancy of defeat. At the end, when they face the law, the rednecks, the mean-mouthed farmers and hick petrol attendants, the scowling women and bragging middle-aged men with fast cars and high-powered rifles — all those who were already there before the heroes came on the scene and who win out and survive, as they invariably do, then the characters' wry self-abandonment and lassitude registers with the particular pathos reserved for 'beautiful losers'; and the cool mockery, the detached satire which such films direct against the America of the silent majority fades out on a wave of self-pity.

If one sees this simply in thematic or ideological terms, the new American cinema here shows its weakest side. For it appears that directors opt for a kind of realism of sentiment that tries to be faithful to the negative experiences of recent American history, and the movies reflect the moral and emotional gestures of a defeated generation, but this strategy — since it is concerned neither with cause nor historical circumstances — gives both heroes and the world that dooms them a mystification and starkness of contrast which must finally affect the intelligence of the observation and therefore the value of the new realism. The narrowness of the emotional response at the climax of *Thieves Like Us* is counteracted by a kind of emotionally flat coda, and it is noticeable that a lot of the so-called nostalgia pictures have

Variations on a theme: highway robbery in Sugarland Express

... the road movie grinds to a halt

such an epilogue (cf *American Graffiti):* it neutralizes the dramatic charge. By foregoing the dramaturgy of interpersonal conflict, suspense, intrigue or the self-alienated aggressiveness of emotional frustration, the films are somehow led to stylizing despair into the pathos of failure. On other hand, it answers the pressing problem of how to end an indeterminate narrative: pathos provides the emotional closure to an open-ended structure and retrieves effective contact with the audience.

Thus, if one feels uncomfortable about the unqualified emotional sympathy enjoyed by the heroes of *Thieves Like Us, Sugarland Express* or *American Graffiti,* one needs to bear in mind that under cover of such a relatively simple but effective hold over the spectator's involvement and identification a new type of popular film narrative is trying to cope with the technical problem of how to depict the unmotivated hero. While European directors — from Straub to Rivette, from Bunuel to Tanner — can conduct an experimentation into the nature of a narrative not generated by any of the conventional dramatic supports such as melodrama, quest, investigation, journey (though as one knows, Bunuel is more than ever committed to the picaresque model), and can work at purely situational narratives *(Céline et Julie se vont en Bateau)* in the comforting knowledge of an appreciative intellectual audience, the pressures on experimentation in the commercial cinema are obviously different. Where French directors in particular like to allow the fictional substance of their films to whittle itself out of existence through an ever-more sophisticated play of multiple fictional strands and fragments, such possibilities are not open to an American director faced with a similar dilemma of representational realism: his remains an audience-orientated cinema that permits no explicitly intellectual narrative construction. Consequently, the innovatory line in the American cinema can be seen to progress not via conceptual abstraction but by shifting and modifying traditional genres and themes, while never quite shedding their support, be it to facilitate recognition or for structuring the narrative. In search of a new realism, Altman or Hellman after periods of non-commercial experimentation (*Brewster McCloud, The Shooting*) can now be seen to return to the realm of the thematic material that is, as it were, culturally coded and cinematically sanctioned. One can see them in their recent films go the narrow path between locating a new image of America and the need to keep in touch with the visual and emotional rhetoric of their culture, and thereby keep open the lines of communication with a mass-public. The price of historical relevance seems to be an acknowledgement of the reigning ideology, and the condition of realism in this situation is the emotional stance of defeat.

In this connexion, it seems to me that the much maligned 'trend' of the nostalgia movie should be regarded under a double aspect. Certainly, *Paper Moon, American Graffiti* are testimony to a symptomatic search for an affirmative, innocent past, free from guilt and responsibility. But the quest for a lost national Eden, perhaps more overtly apologetic in films like *Summer of '42* or *The Way We Were* in which a pointedly non-political apprehension of reality is rather shamefacedly celebrated against the background of a political period, this quest not only communicates a direct thematization of the absence of consequence and history, which, I have tried to suggest, is one of the structurally and ideologically determined features of the American cinema today, it also gives some directors the opportunity to scan a historical and geographical American landscape — notably the Depression era, the early 50s, small-town rural communities — for clues towards what one might call a new verisimilitude of the cinematic image. It is not a question of a pristine visual experience, nor of a documentary objectivity, more the pursuit of a gestural and physical world that connotes historicity and is culturally resonant without being overtly symbolic — set up in contrast to the perfected glamour, the aesthetic closure of beauty as it has been (often falsely) attributed to Hollywood itself, and which critics refer to as the fetishism of the aesthetic illusion. How else is one to understand the assiduous work, say , of Altman who seems bent on emotionally charging the rough, the squalid, the unattractive and plain, the imperfect and incomplete in *McCabe and Mrs Miller, Thieves Like Us, The Long Goodbye, California Split*? Particularly in his genre movies he uses the pathos of historical patina and nostalgia to transform objects and decor — from mining town to Coke bottle and heart-shaped purse — into signs: not into symbols to be used in another kind of discourse (this is why the patchwork quilt in *Thieves Like Us* is so exceptional, for it points in the other direction, that of the classical mise-en-scene, in which objects and decor *are* the material of a meta-discourse), but to refer to themselves, while raising expectations of a pay-off on the level of positive meanings which never quite constitutes itself, except parodistically.

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In his experimentation with a reality untainted or overdetermined by the symbolic accretions that have made so much of the American urban and rural landscape into dramatic clichés, Altman seems to admit the status of the image as inescapable sign, but its sign character can be exploited by focussing emotional resonance on its palpable facticity. Plot, genre convention and intrigue henceforth function in an inverse sense; instead of providing the continuity and logic of the narrative that guarantees the coherence of the secondary level of meaning they become simply the vehicle of a phatic communication underscoring discrete visual moments voided of any specific moral significance. In the absence of any positive motivation of either hero or plot, the pathos of failure becomes the zero-degree of these moralized emotions which the dynamics of eroticism and violence supplied to the classical narrative.

Similar tendencies can be observed elsewhere, they extend beyond the nostalgia and genre-films. In a sense, it is easier to test the possibilities of such an unmetaphoric realism in the context of historical reconstruction or the pre-formulated expectation of the genre, for they give the narrative a provisional structure of empathy and recognition. Yet films with a contemporary setting, such as *Five Easy Pieces* or *Two Lane Blacktop* are generated out of the same desire for an image of America that becomes palpable not because of the interplay between moral symbolism and an ideological plot-struture, but because of its solid specificity, its realized physical presence — whatever the degree of dramatic intensification such films employ to make this realism acceptable. And again we find the same tautological pathos that charges the image with emotion while neutralizing its moral energy. Significantly, Rafelson, Hellman, Spielberg and others choose a 'rural' America, recognizable by its stretches of barren roadside, its drive-ins, petrol-stations and hick town main-streets — the kind of scenery precisely nowhere and everywhere in America, and therefore furnishing an important element of abstraction without being itself abstract. It is a scenery that obviously has the sanction and precedent of the *film noir,* that other high period of an almost documentary realism in the American cinema, but this time, without the black romanticism of mood nor the heavy machinery of fate and destiny knitting together character and incident. Comparable movies today are low-keyed, de-dramatized, but ultimately not so different in their insistence on the emotional stance appropriate to American realism — negativity, a defensive cool, the somewhat sentimental gestures of defeat. One way of looking at it is to say that the new realism is itself a defensive stance: is not the focus on rural America something of an anthropological perspective on an America where nothing ever seems to happen, where time has stood still and where a people survives that apparently has no history? One remembers the encounter of the heroes in *Deliverance* with the banjo-playing cretinous boy. In the very understatement of the scene is hidden an anxious wariness for clues to what it was that has made America of the 60s what it so apallingly is today, as if only the secluded places, the gaps and silences could give an explanation for the violence, the paranoia, as if only rural hamlets could explain urban ghettos and suburban hysterics. A favourite image, put to good effect in *Thieves Like Us,* is to show a fine silence at dawn in an idyllic landscape suddenly torn apart by a furious exchange of gunfire (c.f. also *Sugarland Express).*

Faced with such symbolic re-enactments of morning raids on the Black Panthers or Kent State incidents, one wonders how long directors can go on codifying the experience of a rebellion whose impulse towards change aborted, and which (where it does not lead to a pathos of loss) is now somehow transfixed in stunned moments of inconsequentiality, such as that of George Segal piling up his chips at the end of *California Split,* or Gene Hackman sitting in his demolished

room in *The Conversation*. Today's heroes are waiting for the end, convinced that it is too late for action, as if too many contradictions had cancelled the impulse towards meaning and purpose. In *Two Lane Blacktop* everything goal-directed appears simply neurotic, uncool, a compensation for frustration, like the fantasies of GTO, the Warren Oates character. In *American Graffiti* the action, the constant stream of cars circling the town's main-street, revolves around an 'empty' centre: the mythical DJ whose disembodied 'Wolfman' is nothing more mysterious than a lonely man sitting amongst a lot of technology in his radio-mast eating sandwiches. Clearly in a period of historical stasis, these movies reflect a significant ideological moment in American culture. One might call them films that dramatize the end of history, for what is a story, a motivated narrative (which such movies refuse to employ) other than an implicit recognition of the existence of history, at least in its formal dimension — of driving forces and determinants, of causes, conflicts, consequences and interaction?

However, there is another point: if one considers as I have suggested the pervasive pessimism of the American cinema in the 70s less as a personal statement of their authors and more as the limiting constraint of the new realism, the price it pays for being exploratory, then the strength of a film like *Two Lane Blacktop* lies in the way that, sheltered by the structure of the journey motif, it quietly steers towards a level of abstraction, a documentary minimalism unknown in the Hollywood canon except perhaps in the work of Jacques Tourneur. Released from the fable and from the need to engineer the narrative into didactic shape, the images develop an energy that charges representation with something other than symbolic overtones or metaphoric substitutes: one is, naturally, reminded of the studied literalness in Paul Morissey's films for Andy Warhol, but Hellman's film is free from the claustrophobia so carefully controlled in *Flesh* or *Trash*. Whether the cancellation of the melodramatic impulse and the search for non-literary narrational rhythms will suggest less problematic down-beat endings is difficult to say: the freeze-frame nowadays connotes no more than the indecisiveness of the director on just this point. In *Two Lane Blacktop,* by its own logic, the drive, and thus the film, could go on indefinitely: that is its beauty as a composition of pure movement. The ending — in order to work — quite clearly, must have the status of a 'device': Hellman motivates his hero, the James Taylor character, rather conventionally when underneath his cool he reveals an obsession with the girl. This impulse is allowed to live itself out, albeit destructively — he takes risks and finally meets his nemesis. But cinematically, the ending is aptly 'formal': Hellman lets the image burn itself out in the projector in extreme slow-motion, clearly a metaphor both for the hero's obsession and the film itself.

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The fact that this ending is borrowed from Skolimowski's *Le Départ,* also a film about racing and impossible quests, throws an interesting sidelight on the no doubt complex interchange between European and American film-making today. Tentatively, however, one might assume that both, aware of essentially similar problems, proceed along different routes. Against multiple fictions and double diegesis, the American directors prefer to desymbolize their cinematic language, dedramatize their narratives, to strengthen the inner dynamism of their scenes: the momentum of action gives way to the moment of gesture. A new form of mise-en-scene seems in the making that could mean a revaluation of the real on the far side of either fetishistic fixation or conceptual abstraction. In that case, the unmotivated hero and the pathos of failure will be the double negatives that result in a positive.

Thomas Elsaesser

In the steps of Nicholas Ray. Keith Carradine in Robert Altman's Thieves Like Us

The Assassination of Trotsky

England/France/Italy 1972 **Dir** Joseph Losey **Ed** Reginald Beck **Phot** Pasquale de Santis **Scen** Nicholas Mosley **Prod Des** Richard Macdonald **Art Dir** Arrigo Equini **Cast** Richard Burton (Trotsky) Alain Delon (Jacson) Romy Schneider (Gita) Valentine Cortese (Natalya) Giergo Albertazzi Luigi Vanucchi Dulio de Prete Jean Desailly Simon Valere Carlos Miranda 103 mins.

Amarcord: Riminese dialect: *I remember.* A handful of movies — mainly Italian — whose fascination resided (long before one saw them) in their untranslatable titles. Rossellini: *Viaggio in Italia* — the awkwardness of the English translation *Journey in Italy* echoed by a kind of literal *dépaysment* in the principle characters George Sanders and Ingrid Bergman. Through Rossellini, Godard: *Le Mépris* translated (correctly of course) as *Contempt,* but in the loss of the definite article, a complete change of connotation, which so to speak prevents one from speculating what the movie might be about in a contemptuous castration of sense. In each of these films (and one can think of others—e.g. Truffaut's *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent* and *La Nuit Americaine) the* difficulty of translation turned out to be echoed on the thematic level: they were among other things *about* the confrontation of cultures and languages which their intransigent titles seemed to emblematize. (Consider for example the role of linguistic intermediary between the American Palance and Michel Piccoli that Giorgia Moll occupies in Godard's film). For the directors concerned, this cosmopolitanism might have defined itself as: *a fascination with foreign actors and actresses.* (It is still the interest of watching Burt Lancaster or Farley Granger perform in Italian).

The "play" of language pitches these films in a certain sense towards dream. The oneiric quality of Losey's film, the result of a kind of geographical dislocation symbolised in its multi-national production line-up, is responsible for its continued strangeness after two or three viewings (just as in another way it is doubtless equally responsible for its commercial failure). Perhaps one should stick on this last for a moment. The commercially successful political thriller of the last few years has been European: *Lacombe Lucien, The Conformist, State of Siege* — chic, glossy, intelligent straightforward entertainments. By contrast, the old 'auteur' masters — Preminger, Hitchcock, Losey — have provided interesting films with political subjects that have all of them somehow failed to get off the ground (eg. that brilliant film *Topaz).* They are caught in peculiar problem of the *signifié.* At what level do the events portrayed correspond to real political conflicts? The *thriller form* in which these films are made seems to *fictionalize* them to just the wrong degree (that's to say, to just the degree that is confusing at the box-office). Whereas the current European cinema's *investigation of fascism* along liberal lines allows one to know exactly where one stands: a highly commercial mixture of elegant reconstruction (cars, clothes, furnishing, *women* — see Resnais's *Stavisky)* on the one hand, and portentous historical investigation on the other: Santayana's dictum taken down and dusted at the beginning of *Lacombe Lucien:* "Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it". *(Tristana* is above all this: I agree so far as it goes with David Morse's article/review of Bunuel in Monogram no 5).

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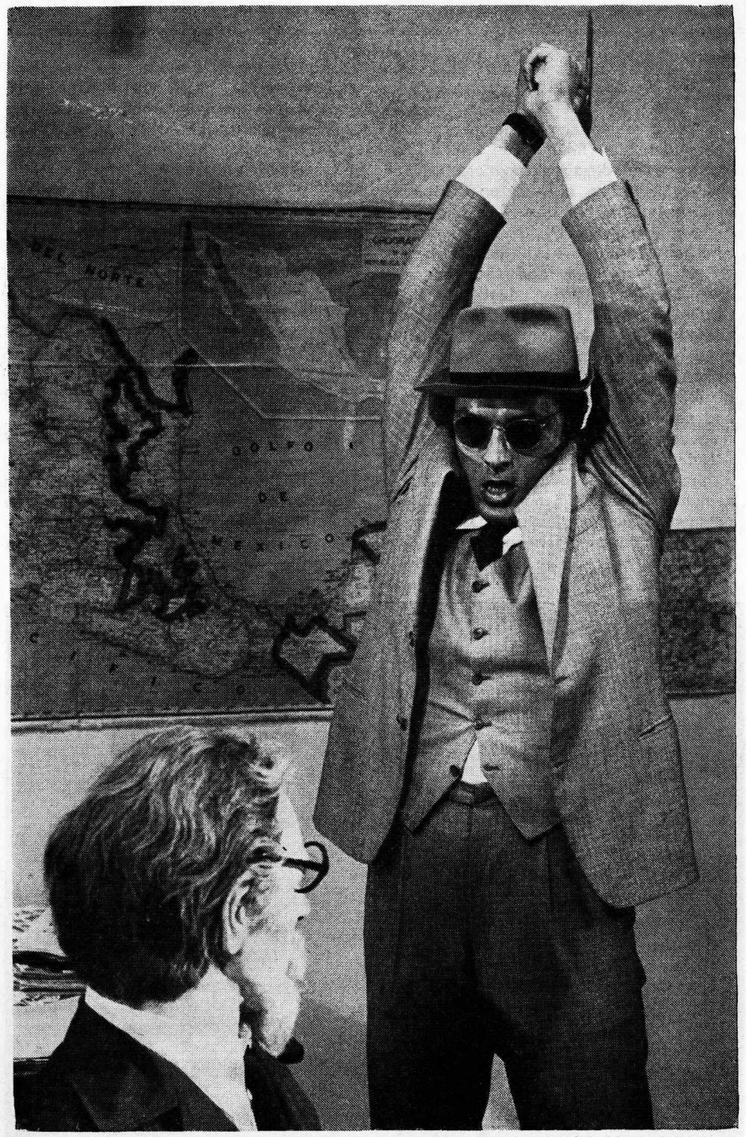
To return to Losey: the pull between Hollywood thriller and European "historical reconstruction" casts this enterprise adrift — very fruitfully, as I shall argue. A strange tension exists in the movie between Europe and America — *imagined* Europe and *imagined* America. Trotsky's exile in Mexico and Losey's artistic exile in Europe overlap and complement each other, but not at all portentously. As violently as *Vent d'Est,* this is a film about art and politics — or in other words, like Godard's, a film about Stalin. Multiple reverberations of fate — in a particularly memorable shot, the different burnished, curved levels of the roof of the Mexican cathedral on which Delon as the future assassin meets his Russian contact seem to stand as the very metaphor for the complexity of Losey's enterprise. (More than a metaphor. It is the mise-en-scene which *is* the complexity! — see below). Whose fates are we talking about? Not only Trotsky's, but all the celebrated Russians who had in their own way served the revolution and received their sardonic rewards (the film has this extraordinary level of cultural and historical resonance). Gorki: another *assassinee,* whose fictional triumphs were being made into "enduring classics of the Russian screen" by Donskoi at just the moment (c. 1936, 37) when he himself was being executed. Einstein: whose own "Mexican adventure" had ended in fiasco, and who is memorialised in this movie by the magnificent use Losey makes of the Mexican murals — great bold slices of colour, the energy of painted icons, struggling peons, the "new" Mexico of scientists, craftsman, artisans (the opening shots of the film are a splendid reconstruction of a political demonstration in a people's republic). By a miracle of metaphorical substitution, of which the absent Eisenstein is the key, the shabby splendour of Mexico, its mixture of colour and drabness, *becomes* the Soviet state itself in its post-revolutionary confusion. (I am trying to comment on the particular level of realism this film seems to occupy, as both a precise reconstruction of a historical epoch — absolutely distinct, individual, memorable, with none of the chic bows to the thirties that one might have expected — and at the same time a film that goes *beyond this level,* but onto which, one is stuck for words to describe succesfully. Symbolic? Poetical? Neither quite capture the sense in which the film exists in both its incarnations simultaneously).

In the end one is forced back to a notion like mise-en-scene, fully aware that the phrase is rather inflated currency these days. *Cahiers du Cinema* used to wax lyrical about the way that a single camera set-up, or the length of a single pan subsumed a whole moral economy, and one feels this is right for Losey. It is more than simply elegance. In fact the shots I am thinking of in *The Assassination of Trotsky* are not particularly "elegant", if one means by that the kind of suavity of camerawork, the virtuosity, that one associated in the past with Welles, and that has come down to us in slightly debased form in the contemporary work of Bertoluci or Antonioni. On the contrary, these shots are very simple and even, like some of Godard's audacities of deliberation, "boring". An example is the scene on the riverboat where the camera performs a 180 degree turn — a truly Godardian slowness — linking the separated Schneider and Delon lying at opposite ends of the boat: elementary choreography — striking, direct and obvious — that manages to suggest at the same time fantastic *complexity of mood:* irrevocable separation, brooding violence (the sharp, bold reds and yellows of the boat's stern), a kind of portentous drowsiness, the whole sequence very beautiful and dreamlike — like certain pastoral interludes from Eisenstein's *Strike* (the drooping willows over the canal's edge, the shabby "dachas" along the bank). It is a feature of even the insignificant scenes. There is a short sequence where Delon, below, stands talking to the guards of Trotsky's villa on their tower lookout which might act as a model of economical exposition, whereby the essentially diagonal lines of the visual composition repeated again and again in the individual shots come to stand for the way in which *clarity* and *obliqueness* are one and the same in works of this degree of formal mastery: (everything that is clear, distanced, cool, conceptual).

The Assassination of Trotsky altogether might be the subject of an interesting essay on cinematic mise-en-scene, since thematically it is so clearly tied up with architecture. Trotsky's exile is lived out in a fortress-like structure, part palace, part prison, whose bizarre and arresting lines Losey uses with characteristic formal boldness (as he has always treated houses). The scene just mentioned where Delon chats to the guards occurs after the place has been unsuccessfully raided by Stalin's agents, and the walls are in the process of being repaired and strengthened. As the guards patiently add another layer of bricks and mortar, while elsewhere the inside walls are given a coat of vivid white paint (presumably the better to pick out nighttime raiders), one assists at the very spectacle of the construction of mise-en-scene, or in other words the way in which physical properties of architecture (boldness, elegance, line) *become* the actual tensions of the drama — the exteriorization of psychological conflict. So too with the Stalinist agent (Delon's boss) whose occupation turns out to be a painter of murals, which are used to vivid effect in the scene where — another long, slow retreating camera shot — the raiding party unpack their stolen police uniforms in a hired studio-warehouse, while huge unfinished papier-maché puppets littered around provide an atmosphere at once theatrical and menacing.

This use of construction-in-progress as a metaphor for the way the filmmaker delimits meaning, setting up its formal boundaries in space, or, in other words, making a conceptual discourse *visible,* is throughout the movie demonstrated almost schematically. (One can think offhand of one or two other instances where this process is demonstrated with equal clarity. The *arch* in Frank Borzage's *A Farewell to Arms* (1932), the *primum mobile* of architecture, as we are told by an ex-architecture student (Gary Cooper) now serving in the ambulance corps, becomes in a brilliant series of montages (the very *architecture* of the movie) the symbol of his love for the English nurse (Helen Hayes). Just as in Losey's film, the formal geometry is only sustained by *tension,* threatening to crash down on the lovers like the upreared statue of the horse and rider in the arbour where they have first made love; much as in *The Assassination of Trotsky* the massive upreared bronze bulls outside the corrida point forward to the collapse of the fragile web of relationships in the violence of the movie's resolution. Elegance, simplicity, and coolness of construction; swiftness and violence of release: the *emotional dynamics* of both these films. In Borzage, tragedy; in Losey, tragic farce (a symptom of the makeshift quality of Trotsky's Mexico, its "theatricality" in the farcical sense — the sardonic "baroque" humour of *Boom!* and *Modesty Blaise).* In the meantime, one might comment in a general way on how successfully certain filmmakers respond to the locations they use, which can only ever be partially constructed to their specifications. Making use of what is at hand with a brilliant, perfectionist eye for detail; the ability to use the angles and planes and colours of the room or studio in which the film is shot, without at the same time drawing overt attention to one's technique; avoiding a too obvious symbolism, yet imperceptibly *structuring* the movie in the way one wants it to go — this is the characteristic *aesthetic economy* of the great Hollywood auteurs of whom Losey, despite his exile, remains an example.

An audacious stylization. Trotsky (Richard Burton) awaiting the assassin's axe



Burton, as Trotsky, is the liability: the *price paid* to get the money to make the kind of film Losey wanted. There must be a moral somewhere. One resurrects *The Assassination of Trotsky* not as a pious act of film scholarship (to use the title of a recent issue of *Velvet Light Trap:* "Forbidden, forgotten, rejected and unlucky films", but because it points to the peculiar hazards of making an idiosyncratically political film within commercial structures. At all events the gamble misfired, at least commercially — and perhaps in the scenes with Burton, artistically as well. Roland Barthes speaks of a certain Darmès, a political conspirator whose hatred of the aristocracy was signalled in the way he spelt the word: haristaukrassie. Written thus, as Hugo says, "le mot est assez terrible". There is an opposite 'value' or timbre in Burton's voice, the voice of the *Shakespearian actor,* where pathos is exteriorised as a particular unctuousness. In the scenes where Trotsky records his memoirs into a primitive recording machine, it is this resonance that is put into the way he pronounces words like "magnanimity" and "unfathomable". Burton as Trotsky,*Burton as Churchill* — what is the difference? (One is only waiting for — Burton as Stalin!) The key throughout is one of resigned nobility: the voice of a man who has experienced, suffered — and feels weary. One speculates: but what if that was exactly the way one *didn't* present Trotsky?

Yet the avoidance of cliché is problem-

atic in this film which is anyhow prodigiously stylised, and in a certain sense deliberately obvious: the scene where Delon in the scrapyard *catches sight of the ice-axe;* or, even more obviously, the parallelism between killing the bull and the bloodiness of the actual assassination. There is a strange undercurrent of farce throughout, so that, perhaps Burton's impersonation of Trotsky as an irritable old Oxford don is part of the movie's fruitful ambiguity, as opposed to its incoherence. Do we give ourselves and Losey the benefit of the doubt? The project is anyhow almost impossibly difficult. How does one dramatise the intellectual? *It is not enough to give him a pair of spectacles* (as the luckless hero of Leto's *La Villegiatura* gets saddled with). Relieved of the necessity attached to political films of a more specific commitment to make of Trotsky what Cahiers now call *un héros positif,* Losey might seem to be falling back on a certain "tragic" reading of Brecht — the Brecht of *Mother Courage* and *Galileo* — in order to present Trotsky in somewhat traditional artistic terms: a great spirit broken by impossible contradictions, haunted by his past as, equally, he suffers premonitions of his future. Yet tragic irony is always the most obvious irony. Cinema's great ability is to displace this irony and the humanist message that goes with it in an exteriorization of affect — into object, into gesture, into violence, into movement — that is responsible, *at least partially,* for the extraordinary exhibition of mise-en-scene that makes up *The Assassination of Trotsky.* The film's other excellences — the absolute rightness of the supporting cast, the tenderness of the relationship between Trotsky and his wife Natesha (paralleled by the intensity Delon and Schneider bring to the parts of the assassin and his unhappy mistress), the completely intransigent violence of the death scenes — everything held together in the ordered flow of narrative: suavity of diegesis — mastery of filmmaking.

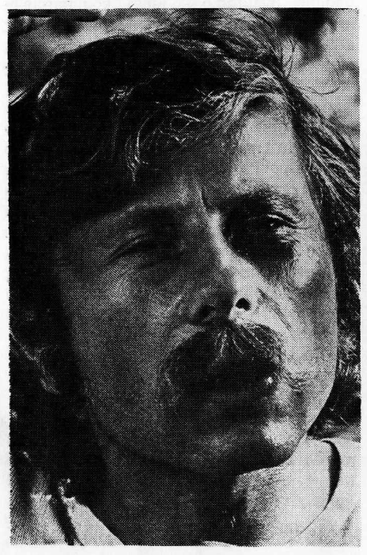
Clare Vildrac

What?

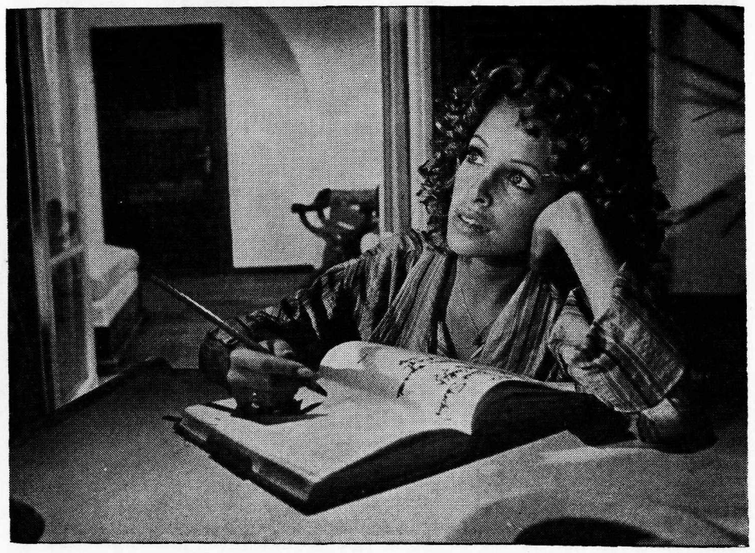
Italy/France/West Germany 1972 **Dir** Roman Polanski **Prod** Carlo Ponti **Scen** Gerard Brach, Roman Polanski **Phot** Marcello Gatti, Giuseppe Ruzzolini **Ed** Alistair Mc Intyre **Des** Aurelio Crugnola **Cast** Sydne Rome (Nancy) Marcello Mastroianni (Alex) Hugh Griffith (Noblart) Roman Polanski (Mosquito) Romolo Valli Guido Alberti Gianfranco Piacentini Elisabeth Witte **Prod** C.C. Champion (Rome)/Les Films Concordia (Paris)/Geissler (Munich) 113 mins.

"Nancy (Sydne Rome), a wide-eyed American hitch-hiker, loses her luggage but salvages her honour and her large diary when a carload of Italians attempt gang rape on a moonlit journey through the montains. She eludes their pursuit by descending the mountainside in a fragile, open-air lift which deposits her outside the palatial villa of a moribund Hugh Griffith. Here she is given accommodation, but wakes in the morning to find that her only T-shirt has been stolen. With her bosom covered only by a small table napkin, she attracts the attention of Alex (Marcello Mastroianni), a recently retired pimp, who proposes an afternoon tryst. While waiting to meet him Nancy appropriates a pyjama top and meets some of the villa's other residents: two lesbian sunbathers; an eccentric priest; the diminutive Mosquito (Polanski himself), whose principle interest is his harpoon gun; Jimmy, an obsessive cook, and Tony, an insatiable stud, both of whom may be Alex's sons. At their rendezvous Alex dresses in a tiger skin, and persuades Nancy to whip him, after which she is happily defiled. That night, after finding her room occupied by a middle-aged American couple, she awakes from a sleep on the beach to discover that her blue-jeans have been removed, probably by Mosquito. Jimmy, who had been in love with her innocence, is not very helpful, and she ends the night playing a Mozart duet with Hugh Griffith's arthritic administrative assistant, Giovanni. The next day provides some minor variations on the last: one of Nancy's legs is painted blue by a lecherous decorator; Alec dresses as a carabiniero and flagellates her before consuming his fatigued passion; then Hugh Griffith ("Noblart") persuades her to grant him a glimpse of her pudenda and dies in a moment of ecstatic nostalgia. Suddenly pursued by all the villa's occupants, Nancy — her few remaining garments snatched by the guard-dog — regains the road and climbs inside a truck full of pigs. It is, she assures Alex, the only way to end the movie." *(Monthly Film Bulletin,* May *1974).*

Polanski alias Mosquito



A diary is a girl's best friend . . .



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" . . . the works of modernity: their value would derive from their duplicity. This is to say that they have always two sides. The subversive side might seem privileged since it is that of violence, but it is not violence which affects pleasure, which has no interest in destruction; what it aspires to is the locus of a loss, is lapse, fissure, deflation, the "fading" which seizes the subject at the heart of its extasy."

R. Barthes Le Plaisir du Texte

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What? is, in Barthes' terminology, an example of a modern cine-text, *texte de jouissance,* that seems to ask for something like a *sémanalyse* as we have seen applied to literary texts. (In a moment of weakness one may be tempted to wonder just what had constituted Polanski's reading matter lately, and how interested he could possibly be in recent developments of French literary criticism.)

On a most superficial level the conventions of narrative are heavily ruptured in *What?,* and the continuity is in Brechtian fashion split up by the collision of episodes without actual (natural) or conventionalised-symbolic transitions, and producing the well-known *Verfremdungseffekt* that frustrates any illusionistic empathy and self-abandonment. More subtly, its own symbolic codes continually collide, and we may apply the following passage by Barthes on Sade with hardly any change to *What?:*

" . . . contradictory codes (for example, the noble and the trivial) come into contact; pompous and ridiculous neologisms are coined, pornographic messages moulded in phrases so pure they might be taken for examples of grammar. As the theory of text says: language is redistributed. But this re-distribution *always takes place by disjunction.* Two sides are outlined: the one prudent, conformist, plagiaristic (a question of copying language in its canonical state such as it has been fixed by education, usage, literature and culture); and *another side,* mobile, protean, (ready to follow any contours), and which is finally ever only the place of its own effect: the point from which one glimpses the death of language. "

A plot summmary like the one cited above is thus obviously of little help and beside the point, and contrasts sharply with the very different objective of this essay.

A preliminary but important difference ought to be pointed out that marks a *ciné-sémanalyse* as opposed to its literary cousin: While the re-creation of a literary text is (in theory) readily achieved (cf. Barthes' S/Z), the cine-critic is forced to switch medium and substitute pen for camera; where he would long for a retake, or wish to freeze a transition of frame to frame into a timeless still, to flash back at will or perform whatever his savouring of the text would require, his medial substitution entails unseemly descriptive paragraphs, plot summaries, distortions of time and movement caused by his verbal struggle and not necessarily reflecting adequately his chosen reading. Hence the ciné-sémanalyse will never be able to stand in the same relation to its prototext the film, as does, say, S/Z to "Sarrasine"; yet neither should this proviso serve to cover up worse imperfections in the following analysis with the excuse of an imperfectible task.

In the cinema it is perhaps, or should be, more obvious that the *sujet du texte* is in fact the spectator, that like Barthes' reader-writer he is the maker of his film.. For in literature there is above all powerful distracting factor: our experientially conditioned willingness to assume the role of the "you" vis-a-vis the "I" of any verbal formulation, which allows us to regard any discourse as that of another, and relegate identification to some more removed plane. Characters are ideal objects for such voyeuristic transference, which moreover can be further indulged or partially withdrawn according to our judgement of these characters at any stage. And when the narrative is unproblematic and the manipulation of the medium successfully obliterated, the spectator projects most easily onto protagonists and grows unaware of his textual role as subject.

. . . but should one record these encounters?

One of the most popular variations of classical narrative is the dual possibility for identification, according to sex, which offers a couple for hero and heroine so as to pose no difficulties for those unwilling to cross sexual barriers in their imagination. *What?* is a long way from this innocent paradigm, and selfconsciously reflects its evolutionary history. While literature has explored a multitude of differentiation from this basic pattern, the cinema has on the whole remained conspicuously faithful to it. Yet if *What?* is subversive it is of course precisely to this established paradigm that it subversively refers, by on the one hand seeming to offer the conventional signals for identification and expecting from the spectator the ability to read them, and on the other hand obstructing the fullfilment of just this process. In other words, this paradigm of classical narrative and hero identification forms part of the cinematic language in its canonical state.

We need to consider further conventions that are intricately connected with identification and which together form the complex network of processes that make possible a reading of the film-text. The most obvious one, especially for the cinema, is the ineluctible plot or action, which with some simplification we may consider axiomatic for the commercial feature-film, together with a generous dosage of verisimilitude.

Plot and hero identification are interdependent, in that the spectator resolves the one with the help of the other. In *What?* he is forced to fall back on his most primitive tactics in his struggle to determine either. In the jungle of *What?'s* non-plot he desperately gropes for a hero as a point of reference and focalisation; potentially (and hopefully) doubts regarding his choice of a hero seek confirmation and clarification in the plot. But this *sujet du texte* is hard put to define itself and become master of its discourse — "de se poser comme possesseur de son discours", — that is to make sense of its film. And what is worse, a message from Polanski refuses to be extracted. Thus it brings home to the spectator most effectively that he is indeed the subject of the cine-text, that it is for him to make sense out of two hours of projected images, instead of being able to sit back and make himself the confidant of an author. The author's Word, though the traps are set, is not to be ascertained either in the philosophical profundities of Heraclitus as revised by Bergson ("You cannot step into the same river twice, as it won't be the same river", or: identical shots are not the same, if only because they are inserted at different places on the reel), nor in the little portrait in the corner, of Polanski alias Mosquito: as the latter disappears behind the terrace wall to dive into an ocean we never see (the undergrowth of the park?), so Polanski, our film-maker, exits conspicuously from his own discourse, to leave the spectator swimming on his own in that extremely fluid medium: *What?* For he is a swimmer, and under heavy attack: "un sujet en procès, s'attaquant à toutes les stases d'un sujet unaire", a subject in a mobile position, that pluralises itself, dissolves. Failing to discern the Voice of the master the viewer casts about for a hero to hold on to. And indeed, Nancy sends out all

the signals of the conventional heroine: She is the most foregrounded and constant presence in the film, for us a red thread on which the episodes are strung, and all the more endearing since she shares our perspective to an important degree, in that she, too, is baffled by the events that happen to her and fails to make sense of the scene at the Villa Ponti. And like us she feigns a certain non-concern in the face of her bewilderment, continuing to act as if she were 'in control' (while we pretend to 'follow' the film).

She looks the prototype of a heroine, too: young, attractive, just "slightly better than ourselves", to make the female spectator admire and envy her, the male desire her in good Aristotelian custom, while at the same time identifying a certain audience, largely that addressed by contemporary advertising, specified as 'trendy' by the current T-shirt and jeans uniform, the near afro-look and the Life-Style of the Young, hitch-hiking around Europe (a post-filmic destination in Istanbul, "And Afganistan last year".) Yet while encouraging such recognition and identification, this caricature of a contemporary heroine at the same time perplexes through over perfection: while the young woman in, say, *Zabriskie Point* is just convincing, Nancy is too much the filmstar, straight from the cover of *Vogue* (or even the Sunday Colour Supplement). Her immaculate make-up is against the original creed, and every hair of her casual mane seems the result of a masterly design by some Haute-Coiffeur on Broadway and transfixed by the leading make of hair spray. Such incongruity is heresy for the faithful and ironic for the less fashionable, and reveals its own contradictions: a commercialised hippy, or a *femme fatale* with the mind of a schoolgirl.

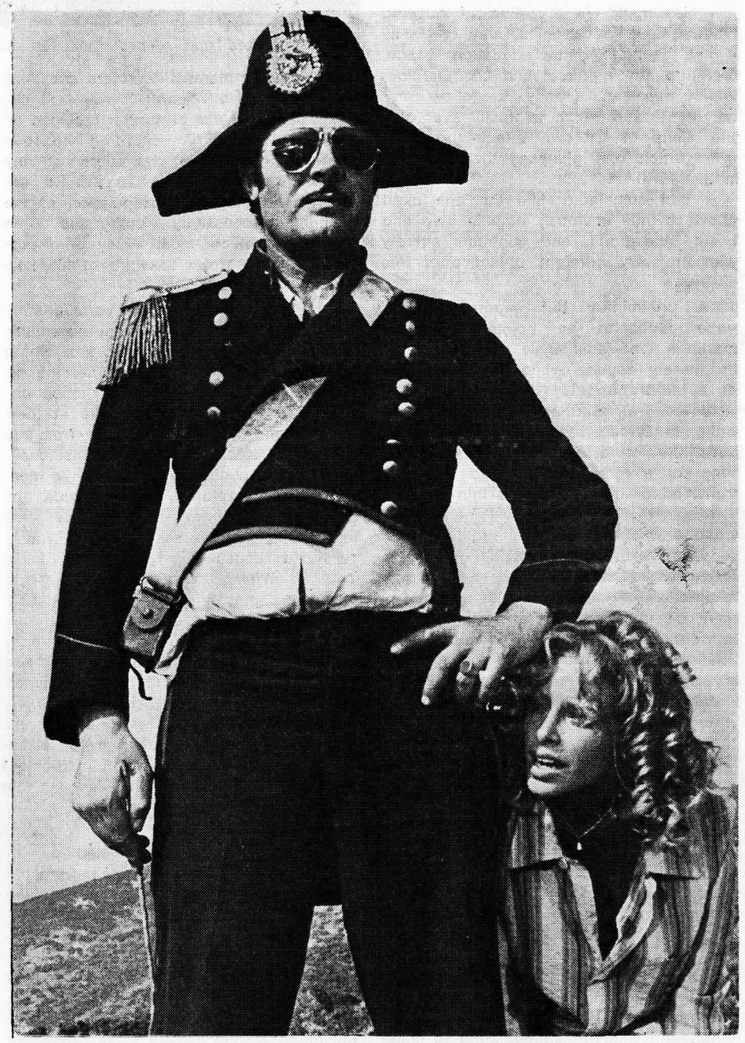
And if doubts are raised by the sign of a heroine on her first appearance, unreserved identification becomes completely impossible once she becomes part of the syntagmatic chain of continuous cliché remarks and stock responses.

For the male who has heard of sexism and its commercial manipulation is gripped by his conscience, just as he believed himself excused from exercising his liberated conscience by what appeared such a generous measure of uncensored sex; while the feminist ready to spot and denounce victimisation of the female is silenced at seeing the victim play her role so eagerly: the more humiliation Alex adds to Nancy's self-esteem the firmer her attachment to him, and the most violent and stock-pornographic of his performances elicits her sincerest declaration of love (quoting *Last Tango?).*

The dialectic of identification and distancing is obviously related to Nancy's alternating roles as patient/object/sign (to whom all these strange events are happening,) and as agent, subject of her own initiative: on the one hand her passive willingness to learn or to wait and see, versus her more aggressive projection of herself as a 'know-all'; sexist victimisation versus active female masochism; display of a touching though misplaced humanism in response to Noblart's last request, versus her confused self-sacrifice against her own feelings; bullied by Jimmy who wants to know whether Alex "defiled" her, but eager to believe that Jimmy had really been in love with her all this time; sensing a tear-stirring romance — "Dont torture yourself, I beg you" — but rejecting his offer to share his couch with him: "No Jimmy ,no... we must wait" and "Only time can heal your wounds"; and finally her projection of herself as one 'whom nothing can shock', while being reduced to tears over the loss of her trousers, stamping her feet in a tantrum and accusing, against her own principles ("one shouldn't judge people too hastily"), the first person she can think of, despite ample evidence of the fallaciousness of her judgment.

The levels on which the clichés are hammered home are multiple and thus prone to reach every possible spectator, constituting those cultural sub-codes Barthes mentions: The Cultured who savour the recognition of the treasures of fine-art and highbrow heritage, so abundantly distributed throughout the villa and caressed by the passing camera, will find the taste turn bitter in their mouths, especially when monitored through their secret games by Nancy's trusting articulation of the 'right answers'; as the Americo-phile, sympathising with the young Yankee 'doing' Europe in the summer, will lose enthusiasm for the portrait she proceeds to create. Yet her basic likability and her charming naiveté are essential for such decomposition to take place, to set in motion a continuous oscillation between sympathy and critical disengagement. We have to recognise our own good values in "One shoudn't judge people too hasily", and our own ingrained Freudianism in "Maybe he had a difficult childhood", to feel the full embarrassment when Nancy applies them. Those who read books themselves understand her readiness to commend *Indirect Sensations* when the cue falls, but wish she didn't reel off the complete reference so insensitively to one who does not share her predilection. Though diaries are supremely private, which secret compiler would not melt to praises like Giovanni's — "it's clear, it's sharp, it's witty... I like it" — and be eager to hear more ("Do you

Mastroianni holding the whip hand



think so?"); yet her susceptibility to flattery in the face of insulting ridicule which makes it possible causes shame, or at least conflict.

Nothing is sacred to this process of decomposition: her diary entries, even though so understandable and familiar, and often expressing our own responses — say, with regard to the priest Pietro: "What's the church coming to?" — reveal the trashiness of their formulation when exposed to our eyes, as do the even more trivial remarks — "The weather is fine", and private recordings — "Dislocated knee getting into lotus position. Meditated a dandelion for an hour and three-quarters". The instance throws more serious reflections on contemporary recording mania in general and illustrates aptly that our language ("le langage courant") shows signs of wearing. Similarly Romance, as it has been in use for too long and become a ready-made configuration of predictable ingredients (a myth, as in Barthes' *Mythologies)*, is mocked repeatedly and on several planes — e.g. the full-moon night on the beach, heavily underlined by appropriately emotional music, — as well as in Nancy's girl's dreams with regard to the one and only topic of Romance, love affairs. At an other time, when Catone's men bring in a huge historical canvas, Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (though the house generally favours the modern), Nancy's conditioned response to "a masterpiece!" is expressed in a rhetorical question which, though embarrassing in the usual way of her remarks, would have some validity as a true question: "Shouldn't it be in the museum?" Should it indeed. And isn't Capone's business just as realistic a context for it, so that both mutually beg the question.

Naiveté, however, seems to be the underlying constant to all our embarrassment: the good-will and unrestricted admiration of Young America for Ancient Europe, seat of Culture and History, a Europe, which however we see to have grown old, cynical and decadent ("an old bitch gone in the teeth"). Hence we cannot accept the good-will of a potentially fresher energy towards a guilty lethargy, and are disturbed in our seeing by the blind admiration.

Mr. Noblart, the house-holder, literally keeping the villa together, and from whose achievements and accumulated wealth degenerate epigones draw exlusively — a tycoon of all noble art — is lying on his deathbed and undergoing a Don Quixotian peripathetic discovery that as life is drawing to an end he begins to prefer the real thing to its image, the eating of an apple to contemplating a Cezanne, yet finding it too much when finally he is granted a glimpse of the real. Nancy's entry into her diary reads: "A wonderful old tyrant like Michelangelo's Moses" (yet if learned reference must be, we might rather think of Gerontion.)

As for his descendents: the sublimator Art holds no interest whatsoever; with a blasé indifference they pay masterpieces as much heed as they would any wallpaper on which they wanted their servants to crush a fly. Bacon is known in the context of breakfast only — to that extent the proverbial superiority of the servants' insight into their masters' affairs is aptly reflected by the paradoxical inversion of their ignorance that tops the masters' indifference. Alex, prostitutor of women, senses congenial employment in the mafiose trade of masterpieces. In general, with the refinement and oversophistication of the cultural heritage handed down to them, their sexuality has kept comparable pace to reach exaggeration and preciosity in various different forms: Alex, a drained pimp made redundant, afflicted he claims with lice but more likely with syphilis, and requiring the most eclectic stimulations (e. g. the crunching of a ping pong ball between his toes) in order to ignite his sexual fantasies which themselves rely on copious paraphernalia. Tony, a sex-maniac who cannot finish his dinner before his powerful drive compels him back to bed again, whence Lollipop no longer even arises; Lesbian sunbathers, some of the nudist persuasion, and homosexuals likely to have gone Platonic in the spiritual sense due to a total immunity and indifference to anything carnal. Mosquito's big sting may well be a phallic symbol in a retrograde 'unawakened' child-sexuality, but it is not a metaphor, as the clever (however professedly innocent) were quick to get wrong together with Nancy. And his interest in tennis-shoes, a Well-Known object for fetishism, is far greater and more real than in anything the lovely Nancy has to offer, notwithstanding his aesthetic preference for bottoms over bosoms; but anything harpoonable is good enough for venting unsublimated aggression. The trouble with oral sex, Giovanni is made to realise, is that one doesn't recognise one's partner very well in the dark.

Unlike the silent, though privately verbose, middle-aged majority who are sure that "America is ahead of Europe", our representative of the younger generation, Nancy, proves herself well open and liberal towards the values of another culture which yet, historically, is so much 'her own'. Not only is she adequately equipped with a bourgeois education that is more thoroughly central European and cultural than the real: a grounding in everyman's psychology, academic agility concerning bibliography, she knows her masterpieces and her composers and has had her piano lessons. But the ultimate proof of a humble and absolute orientation towards that European Mecca is offered in her touching faith and optimism that basically all lies before her, that phylogenetic history is ontogenetic future, in that a trip after High- or Graduate school will make it all hers. Such unrestrained optimism is predictably going to over-shoot: the blindness to reality has already been mentioned, but Nancy is moreover impressed and prepared to accept anything and everything Europe has to offer:

"A pimp? Really?... With women?... You took money from them? . . . Did you have many?. ."

And Alex has already practically won her admiring and self-renouncing love, since she wants to play up to anything the Europeans may do.

Thus her very quest for knowledge is severely put into question. The desire on the one hand and its object on the other are exposed in a grandiose gesture that is the film-text *What?*, with the dialectic of all its sub-strata, and which culminates in the pronouncement by the haggard German nurse, who has been fulfilling unsentimentally her duty to tend the dying giant, reading Nietzsche:

"Herr Noblart is tot! Herr Noblart ist tot!"

What? itself is an embodiment of the Nietzschean paradox prophesying the advent of the modern cultured man, passionate hater of culture, when Art will have served its term as the last instance of religion and gone the way of all religions. Just as paradoxical is the watching subject, *sujet clivé,* needing all its sophistication in order to decompose itself in the sophisticated enterprise of whatching *What?* and failing to establish a secure relationship to the film or to any one of its levels — 'reality', the film-maker's attitude or the message, plot character etc — thus unable to situate itself in such a discourse and define itself as *sujet unaire.* And even should the spectator try by an immense effort to suppress all his doubts and objections to the intrinsic contradictions embodied in the heroine, he will find himself finally and irrevocably betrayed by her cry in the end, admitting that she has all along been in the know, party in a conspiracy with 'the film-maker' which leaves out Mastroianni as much as the spectator:

"..... we're in a movie, aren't we? ..... *What?,* that's the name of the movie... Goodbye, my darling! I'll send you a postcard" — making quite sure that even this sudden and ultimate revelation will not stabilise the film at last at a definitive level, since we are unable to determine whether this is Sydne Rome speaking or Nancy, seeing that Alex is unwilling to turn into Mastroianni and give up the game, but on the contrary returns to his cyclically recurring suggestion:

"What would be nice... would be if we could get together quietly some time..... to have tea for example..... today or tomorrow....." Thus traditional dénouement is finally made impossible.

Susanne Kappeler

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What? — "Texte de jouissance: that which leads into abandon, which discomforts (maybe even to the point of a certain *ennui),* which unbalances the historica, cultural psychological foundations of the reader, the consistency of his tastes, his values and memories, and creates a state of crisis in his relationship with language."

We, the spectator —... "an anachronistic subject... that which holds the reins of both pleasure and extasy, for it partakes at the same time and conflictingly in the profound hedonism of all culture... and in the destruction of that culture; ... it is a subject doubly split, and doubly perverse"

R. Barthes, *Plaisir du texte.* p. 25-6.

Aguirre, the Wrath of God

W. Ger. 1972 **Dir** Werner Herzog **Phot** Thomas Mauch, Francisko Joan, Orlando Machievello **Ed** Beate Mainka-Jellinghaus **Mus** Popol Vuh **Cast** Klaus Kinski (Aguirre) Cecilia Riviera (Flores de Aguirre) Ruy Guerra (Pedro de Ursua) Helena Rojo (Inez de Atienza) Del Negro Peter Berling Daniel Ades Armando Polanah Edward Roland **Prod** Werner Herzog Filmproduktion with the Hessischer Rundfunk. 95 mins.

The metaphysical swamp: poetic realism

1560: the Spanish imperialist adventure in full swing: an expedition sent on ahead by Francisco Pizarro down the Amazon river becomes obsessed with finding the fabulous city of El Dorado. Werner Herzog's *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* is a film of puzzling beauty, and fascinating not least in terms of the questions it poses for the currently popular semiological (code-oriented and in certain respects anti-evaluative) method of film criticism. As is well known, this type of criticism rests on the assumption that cinematic material is structured as a language; that film is a discourse which operates always within the limits of certain 'codes', aware of those limits and concerned to manipulate them in such a way that, although still nominally in force, the conventions are shown, at selected moments, to be contingent. The practise of such criticism involves the isolation and definition of these codes; an examination of their development and interaction in the course of the film; and finally, should the film in question happen to be in the critic's good books, a demonstration of how the movie recuperates itself through a moment or two of *dialectical lucidity* (i.e., frees itself from total complicity with the ideology whose conventions it perpetuates).

The technique possesses certain virtues: it makes possible, for instance, a less complacent ideological rendering of the film than we have been used to in the patient, intelligent elucidations of a Durgnat or a Robin Wood, where despite their evident taste and erudition, one feels that what is lacking is exactly that political self-consciousness that seems to be the mark of modern discourse (it sometimes seems that their very lucidity is the proof of that lack!) Where semiology fails, though (a direct result of its relentlessly analytic origins), is in giving an account of the affective-aesthetic dimension of film; pleasure, when permitted to enter into the discussion at all, creeps in through a Lacanian/Barthesian back door disguised as jouissance, transgression, the shattering of codes. The theory tends to exhibit a disregard for that dimension of pleasure once known as 'aesthetic delight' — and which, in view of the great formal elegance and mastery of Herzog's movies, one might do worse than re-assert.

This is particularly evident in *Aguirre*. Here we require a vocabulary which recognizes the importance of surface: of surface made into an important thematic element — of images whose potency does not so much elucidate the narrative structure as supersede it. Herzog's energy, like Aguirre's, does not proceed towards a goal: or rather, that goal is chimerical, a pretext. With puzzling and perhaps ironical subjectivity he drifts his camera along the river bank or over the impenetrable planes of an Indian's face, the very intensity of certain images seeming to render their narrative context incidental (Aguirre awkwardly clutching his velvet-gowned daughter to his waist; she is dying, but that is not the point of the shot).

It is a film for the eye: by which I mean that it remains consistently and deliberately at the level of the under-interpreted, the opaque, the non-signifying image. Although a work of consummate and impressive intelligence, perhaps the most intelligent of all Herzog's aesthetic decisions in *Aguirre* is that which leads him to sacrifice the historical and moral content of his narrative to the physical intensity of the landscape in which it unfolds, and which repays him with its fabulous oneiric strangeness. This is in distinct contrast to the more typical procedure of exotic or rugged location films, which is to make the vegetable world a silent accessory to the values discussed by the plot. The Amazonian rainforest is presented in *Aguirre* not as an alternative or antithesis to civilization, a procedure whereby the filmmaker brings the unknown within the compass of his discourse taming it into allegory; on the contrary, the visnal resonance of the jungle is left strangely alone, and not translated into the kind of importunate significance one associates with more conventional cinematic approaches to nature.

So the film is not the simple-minded opposition between barbarism and culture that we see, for instance, in movies as different as *The Bridge On The River Kwai, The African Queen,* or *Deliverance*. Herzog's characteristic excellence is rather a refusal of polarity, a delicate suspension of issues which he accomplishes not so much by *writing* it into the film (i.e. by manouevering the plot, or by permitting the characters explicit verbal irony) as by shooting it in; the surface of the film is made to carry this low-keyed irony and directs our attention onto the voluptuous density of nature — a tactic which situates the moral dimension at a kind of degree zero of signification.

This 'frozen' quality of the movie (a spell broken only by the vertiginous final sequence in which Herzog's camera swoops down and circles the desolate raft) characterizes not only the visual surface of *Aguirre,* but its script as well. In the original German, Herzog's scenario is as opaque and grammatically overexplicit as a sentence from Wittgenstein; the language has a lack of nuance, a surplus clarity which de-humanizes it and empties the words the actors speak of

relevance, of connexion with actual objects. *Aguirre* solemnly declares each bank of the river the property of his Habsburg princeling — as he has previously declared the princeling the new King of Spain, and ceremoniously deposed the Emperor *in absentia*. Language appears blandly — or ominously — functional, relies on elaborate conditional constructions to say simple things and rarely includes an adjective or metaphor. Like the beautiful, reticent *mise-en-scène*, it is an instrument of distanciation and arrest (rather than progress or communication), of that enigmatic austerity which is the vehicle of the film's poetry.

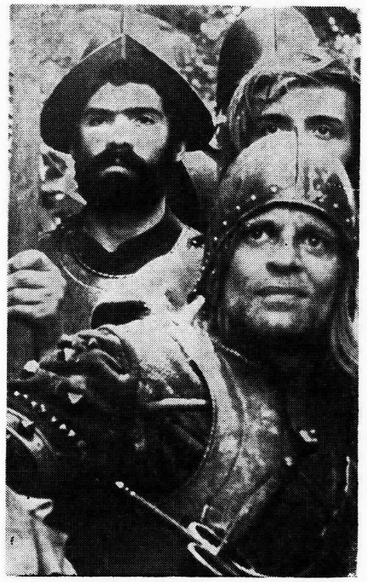
Thus the language of the film, like its images, and in fact like the expedition itself with its chimerical destination, is cut loose from any moral, conceptual or historical mooring: like the raft, it only *drifts*. Similarly with the reed-pipe music of the Indian who accompanies the expedition and whom Aguirre forces to play in moments of tension. The narrative function of these sequences — that is to say, their function as suspense — is undercut by the strange banality of the music itself, recalling that scene in *Fata Morgana* in which a night-club couple perform apparently endless and aimless variations on piano and percussion. In the first of those sequences in *Aguirre*, Herzog holds his camera in a motionles medium shot which has Aguirre (Klaus Kinski) passive and threatening on the left of the frame, and the Indian bobbing up and down as he plays his pipes on the right. As in the scene of the night-club duo, the shot is held much longer than one would expect, and has the effect of neutralizing the narrative which surrounds it in that curious impression of displacement which seems to be the movie's signature.

Clearly, one of the aspects which most draws Herzog's eye is the crazy matter-of-factness of the journey; the ritualized minutiae of a rigid communal life are enforced just as carefully in despatching an expedition to El Dorado as in sending someone off to Cadiz. With a Rossellinian delight in the technicalities, the trivial details which compose the specific substance of life in a distant time and place, Herzog displays the iron stencil through which Pizarro painstakingly inscribes his signature or the crumbling leather folio in which official papers are collected on board Aguirre's raft. This gratuitous pleasure in sheer fact illuminates and poeticizes the film to an extraordinary degree in a way which is altogether characteristic of Herzog's aesthetic.

Yet if in certain respects similar to Rossellini's materialism, Herzog's interest in the texture of history also significantly differs from it. Rossellini seems always drawn to the scene of 'mainstream' history, to crucial moments in the development of the bourgeois state (the consolidation of monarchic centralism under Louis XIV; the triumph of Victor Emmanuel's democratic monarchy and of Italian nationalism in *Viva l'Italia),* whereas Herzog's locations seem always on the margins of history — the Sahara desert in *Fata Morgana,* or in the case of *Aguirre* at the literal boundaries of the known world, a mutinous digression from the route of the main expedition. Rossellini's interest lies in the successful move, the effective character; the pedagogic strain in his aesthetic is satisfied by the opportunity this offers to analyse technological phenomena — the physical object and processes which form the substance of any historical epoch — as, precisely, determined by a vast system of historical cause and effect. The sartorial extravagance of Louis XIV's court in *Le Prise de Pouvoir de Louis Quatorze* is not an arbitrary whim, but an important part of the king's plan to relieve his nobles of excess wealth. Objects are instrumentalized, consistently made the vehicle of, human, historically conscious intent. For Rossellini, objects are exemplary, and ask for analysis in their historical determination. Herzog by contrast is more interested in their autonomous, incidental presence. Where Rossellini uses Louis XIV's lavish meal as an emblem of his real political ascendancy over the nobles who are forced to stand by and watch him consume it, the banquet served to the puppet "King" Guzman in *Aguirre* — broiled fish and quinces while the crew receives its daily ration of a few grains of corn — conversely illustrates the notion of kingship without power, an individual dementia sustained by Aguirre's force of character alone but which has no substance to back it up.

So Herzog's interests appear to be not in the bourgeois-materialist or mainstream reading of history which Rossellini supplies, but in a certain *departure from* history effected by imperious and extraordinary individuals — here, in *Aguirre,* a descent into anarchic fantasy presented exactly as the genesis of a new type of historical reality. In the closing shots, with everyone except Aguirre (wrath of God, author of the ruin which surrounds him) dead or dying, and the raft overrun by hundreds of chattering monkeys,

Aguirre (Klaus Kinski) and followers



he declaims to a monkey imprisoned in his fist his intention of founding in El Dorado a new dynasty of heroes, descendants of the incestuous union between himself and his daughter. This treacherous version of history (signalled explicitly: "I am the great traitor") doesn't seem to be the subject of Herzog's irony as it might have been, but the occasion of a lyrical homage by the filmmaker to the purity and tenacity of his hero's vision: which is the point of the exultant motion of Herzog's final shot as the camera swoops down and circles the raft with such liberating force and elegance.

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These remarks which emphasise the unusual, low-keyed structure of Herzog's film and its puzzling digressions aren't meant to minimise the fact that in other ways the narrative structure of *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* operates directly enough: this is to say, it functions with the kind of aesthetic economy which is the characteristic feature of "classic" Hollywood. For instance, one often finds that the opening shots of American pictures of the 30's and 40's possess the kind of clarity and directness which lifts the story from its immediate origins and transforms the postulates of the plot into something altogether more abstract and metaphorical. The spare precision of the opening sequence of Walsh's *High Sierra* for example (at random), which has the sole purpose of establishing in the shortest possible length of time the background leading up to the drama we are about to watch, becomes by a paradoxical process the secret of the movie's dramatic reflections on such "abstract" issues as individual freedom and constraint. The still shot of the mountain peak over which the credits unfold establishes the High Sierras as the goal of Humphrey Bogart's quest in such a sensible and "overdetermined" way that it somehow fulfils *more* than its narrative purpose; just as a few seconds later, the stylized and economical manner in which Walsh shoots Bogart's stroll in the park on his release from jail, manages to make the sun streaming through the trees throw shadows which mimic the bars of the prison cell, and which further engulf the story in an aura of fatality. So in *Aguirre* the magnificent opening shot of the expedition strung out vertically in line as it descends the hill, "held" and distanced as it is by the etherial choir music on the sound track (Popol Vuh), not only places the expedition in its narrative context — a historical inventory which introduces the cast of warriors, noble ladies, slaves, baggage animals etc. — but also in its "metaphysical" or poetic context, poised in its strange displaced way, picking its way in single file across the alien terrain in a weirdly automonous purposiveness. The *waywardness* of this essentially linear model like the river with its curves and bends and hidden dangers, is a metaphor for Herzog's idiosyncratic use of narrative, which never quite drops Hollywood's goal-oriented dynamics, but never quite confirms them either.

Andrea Simon

Nada

France/Italy 1974 **Dir** Claude Chabrol **Sc** Jean-Patrick Manchette **Phot** Jean Rabier **Ed** Jacques Gaillard **Art Dir** Guy Littaye **Set Dec** Henri Berger **Mus** Pierre Jansen **Cast** Fabio Testi (Buenaventura Diaz) Michel Duchaussoy (Marcel Treuffais) Maurice Gerrel (Andre Epaulard) Michel Aumont (Goemond) Lou Castel (D'Arey) Didier Kaminka (Meyer) Lyle Joyce (Ambassador) Mariangela Melato (Veronique Cash) Jean-Lois Maury (Minister's Secretary) with Vivianne Romance Andre Falcon Katia Romanoff **Prod** Films de la Boetie (Paris)/Verona Film (Rome) by Andre Genoves 134 mins.

In contrast to the decors of his movies, the excellence of Chabrol's cinema has always resided in its being a cinema of bad taste. This has something to do with a generally malicious and sardonic treatment of supposedly edifying subject matter. The joke is good and it still takes in critics. At any event, *Nada* is simply one of Chabrol's best films to date. It is fitting that a filmmaker so interested in the interaction of ethics and elegance — mutually supporting attributes to the extent that one is never quite sure which *comes first* — should finally choose to portray that most intransigent of all types of dandy, the professional revolutionary. Yet unlike the late Jean-Pierre Melville whose tough guys are also in their own way exquisites, which does not, however, prevent the drama from being played straight, Chabrol gives evidence of wanting to treat his theme in most respects with irony. I say in most respects, because it is exactly the way in which *Nada* is *not* ironical which provides the viewer's difficulty. Meanwhile, the irony, as always in Chabrol, manifests itself as an excess of sign. This is immediately apparent in the figure of the leading member of the anarchist group which gives the film its title, Buenaventure Diaz, as played by Fabio Testi. Testi brings an admirable and farcical solemnity to the act of dressing up in full anarchist regalia (black scarf and sombrero etc.) for forays into the Latin Quarter where he will be confronted with nothing more dangerous than a plain-clothes policeman demanding to see his papers (his identity card, in another nice touch, describes him as a musician), or the concierge's husband asking him to keep the noise down. This "overdetermination" of appearances at the expense of substance (a possible definition of irony) and which takes the form of a concern with dress, extends to the scene at the end of the film where having escaped from the farmhouse where the group have been in a combined police and military bombardment, Diaz breaks into the deserted weekend cottage. Here he showers, tends his wounds and doesn't omit to help himself to one of his absent host's *handsome white polo-neck sweaters* — this as a prelude to working out the details of his final showdown with the police chief Goemond (Michel Aumont). The scene is a paradigm of revolutionary narcissism, played here as throughout by Testi with a totally convincing insolence.

With Epaulard (Maurice Garrel), the professional whom the group engage to help carry out their kidnapping operation, the dandyism lies not so much in his clothes (although his light tropical suits and dark blue sports shirts have their own shabby distinctiveness) as the fact that his whole bruised, tough, sympathetic persona — he even has a slight facial tic — corresponds almost too perfectly to a certain archetype of the screen professional so that it unwittingly becomes a parody. For the girl in the group, Veronique (Mariangela Melato), it becomes a pqestion of what he *should* look like rather than what he is (significantly, she thinks he looks like the novelist Roger Vailland). Finally, in the intellectual leader of the group, Treuffais (Michel Duchaussoy), the dandyism resides not just in a certain life-style defined in his unusual furniture and appartment which I shall return to, but more specifically in his occupation, as a teacher of philosophy in a smug and well-heeled boy's school. As in Hitchcock, mention of ethics never serves the purpose it looks as if it should. In the American cinema narrative looks after ethics, in the sense that the dynamics of plot always exteriorise inner psychological conflict, so that where ethical possibilities are discussed openly they operate a different, probably ironical, code. In contrast to the lack of verbal explanation for even the most violent actions in a standard Hollywood genre film — the western, say — where that silence is in some degree a guarantee of the act's integrity, lengthy disquisitions on ethical questions function either to warn us that the characters involved are guilty of a prissy and compunctious intellectualism, or, as more frequently in Chabrol's anti-Christian satires *(Ten Day's Wonder, The Rupture, The Beast Must Die)*, to undermine the whole basis of morality which the action rests on. This is the opposite of the American cinema which is a cinema not about choice, but about will — measured in gesture and action. Thus, to talk about ethics is a sign that they are already being relativised, or rather, that they are being *aestheticised.*

Even in the case where traditional ethics are rejected, as when Treuffais throws in his job at the Lycee as a prelude to be kidnapping, the alternative code he adopts is presented in such an extreme antinomian form as to function as yet another excess of sign. This is the significance of the literally gratuitous violence in the scene where Treuffais attacks the motorcyclist after his car has stalled at the traffic lights; or the contemptuous dismissal, just falling short of physical violence, of the bearded student who knocks on his door collecting funds. In different ways Chabrol makes this the characteristic, the distinctive, dandyism of the two remaining members of the group — the world of the waiter Meyer (Didier Kaminka) being revealed in the solipsistic child's drawing his mad wife presents him with to make up a quarrel; while D'Arey's (Lou Castel) alcoholism furnish him in the breakfast scene in the farmhouse with the necessary courage to damm everybody, including his companions in the conspiracy, with a reckless bravado. This is of course a conceptual pun on the meaning of "anarchism", just as in *Le Boucher* (1971) Jean Yanne's occupation (a butcher) is too obviously linked to his *secret* occupation (a murderer) for the effect not to be something more than ironical.

Another way of saying that Chabrol is interested in dandyism is to say that he is concerned in his films with the morality of role-playing. He consistently undermines his characters by suggesting a certain contingency or lack of necessity in the part of the drama they find themselves caught up in, all the more so in that they seem to fit their roles so well — which is only to say that they fit them too well. This is primarily a literary preoccupation, and in *Nada,* sure enough, Inspector Goemond mistakes the red and black anarchist insignia of a book he has seized from Diaz's flat for the more celebrated "Le Rouge et le Noir", written by an author whom the eccentric and scurrilous *béyliste* Paul Léautaud reminds us had 179 aliases. Role-playing, then functions as irony and distance: this is one way of enabling one's fictions to avoid the complicity of tragedy, if that is how one judges tragedy, to operate. Where Bergman in *Persona* uses the myth of *Elektra* to ratify the statement he is offering about the spiritual malaise of his time, Chabrol in *Les Noces Rouges* (1973) uses the Oresteia of Aeschylus precisely to *subvert* whatever claims to tragic nobility his pair of doomed lovers — those middle-aged ironists Michel Piccoli and Stephane Audran — may possess: thus, if they have any claims on our sympathy, the uniqueness of their case is belittled by it paralleling so obviously other more ancient, more momentous occasions. The end result — and this is arguably a potentially more authentic response for a modern sensibility — is closer to farce than to tragedy.

It is not hard to see that *Nada* abounds with such elements at all levels. It is there in the writing of the two clowns, Dominique Zardi and Henri Attal, from earlier Chabrol movies into the script as the assistants of the police chief Goémond, and later as the sadistic, unintelligent tortures of the arrested Treuffais. Goémond's relationship with the Minister's ice-cool Private Secretary (Jean-Louis Maury) and with Madame Gabriele (Viviane Romance), keeper of the brothel from which the American ambassador is to be ambushed, are played as splendid, sardonic comedy, as part of the complicated choreography of how the characters adjust their roles to the reigning predicament (Goémond is an animal to his inferiors and captives, a cringing, inarticulate butt to the scorn of the minister's man) — so delicately and accurately observed as to make the movie a comedy of manners, or as always in Chabrol, a class comedy. Farce is ineptitude in another guise, and the bungled attempts of the French government to cover up the "irregularities" of the farmhouse siege (where no quarter was given) reinforce a level of confusion and error which, too, is unconducive to the lucidity of tragedy. Remembering how important violence is as a metaphor of authenticity in the American cinema, one can report that in *Nada* even the scenes of violence do not escape irony if, to take an example, the killing outside the brothel of a police motor-cycle rider *by a catapult* is anything to go by. The policeman's head, goggle-eyed with surprise, fills up the bulk of the screen: suddenly from the centre of his forehead blood jets out in a profuse cascade. This is the very opposite of those authentic, "accidentally photographed" mimes of death we are used to from Rossellini and post-war neo-realism. In Chabrol, like Peckinpah, there is a poised balletic choreography of death, something ritualistic and stage-like, where the quantities of blood split only serve to reinforce how essentially theatrical the conception really is.

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Or nearly always. It is important to make this distinction. There is an inherent ambivalence about the portrayal of violence which suggests that it must always be a focal point in measuring how ambiguous, how metaphorical is the status of a particular discourse. Violence can serve, as I think Chabrol sometimes makes it, as a distancing device, something rhetorical or theatrical, in the end something not much more than punctuation. But at the same time it is in the nature of its portrayal to exert a strong identificational pull. In *Nada* this involves a certain overall plausibility in the plot and in the treatment. The cinema does what the theatre cannot and that is offer the subject of violence not as some abstract discourse (in such conjunctures as "The Theatre of Cruelty", where the humanism it hopes to repudiate is recuperated in what inevitably becomes a statement about the "human condition" — see for instance the plays of Edward Bond); but rather as it erupts in a specifically imagined set of circumstances which after all might be about other things as well; that is to say where the importunity of violence as subject matter (capital letters, signalling importance, concern, weightiness of the issue etc.) does not succeed in swamping the question of verisimilitude. Violence is seen to arise *out of the story* rather than being imposed from without as some portentous problem. Apart from handful of films where it has been dealt with by critics out of context *(The Wild Bunch, Straw Dogs, A Clockwork Orange)*, violence in the cinema is not at root controversial, as it deliberately is in the theatre. Which is to say once more that it is subordinate to the demands of the plot, to, finally, a certain realism.

Chabrol in *Nada* uses this dual status of violence rather well. It *can* be used theatrically as in the instance I referred to earlier. Yet the siege of the farmhouse does not leave one with this impression — even if the initial casualty (a policeman shot in the forehead) mimics the previous violence outside the brothel and introduces a suspicious note of symmetry into the supposedly haphazard and contingent schedule of death. The subsequent gunbattle however leaves all this behind in the convincingly detailed way Chabrol depicts the group disintegrate — psychologically, morally, physically — under the prolonged bombardment. The deaths of Epaulard, Veronique and Meyer are superbly articulated and here if nowhere else not primarily theatrical. It is as if the blank backdrops which, on the stage, stand for an abstract area in which the notion of cruelty can be explored had been filled in by a mass of interesting details. Chabrol *renders* his film masterfully. The advantages are all his: to deprive a text of its abstract and exemplary status is to go a long way towards purging it of secondhand literary attributes (of which the "humanism" of the Bond plays is the ideological residuum). Chabrol instinctively uses what the cinema offers to construct an interrogation of violence not dependent for its truth on verbal ratification of the kind provided in drama by delivered lines and set speeches. His use of decor and setting, for instance, literally fills in those virgin backcloths of the stage with a wealth of contradictory signs which taken together give the film its compelling idiosyncrasy. The audience is forced to puzzle out the rights and wrongs of the group's most vociferously anti-bourgeois theorist Treuffais living in a spacious, austere panelled apartment with all the trappings of good taste: as similarly, the poujadiste petit-bourgeois police inspector Goemond living in a chrome and leather studded apartment which looks as if it had been furnished indiscriminately from a mail order catalogue sent out by one of the more advanced firms of Milanese interior decorators.

This is the malicious and clairvoyant eye for detail of a Hitchcock. Its payoff is *complexity*, which where it becomes a moral complexity takes us back to the problem of characterization. If the characters in the movie because of their theatrical and overdetermined presentation are in one sense puppets, the intensity of conviction with which they are played as the film unfolds unwittingly draws the audience into a concern with their destiny; (thus, to continue the comparison between the stage and cinema, it is perhaps a measure of the latter's strength that it manages to use different levels of acting and verisimilitude *within the same discourse,* whereas the stage, having chosen its "style" of acting is condemned to follow it through consistently to the end. In fact one is tempted to say that acting is only ever a problem on the stage, since the theatre lacks film's prodigious ability to *place* acting either by rhythm, editing or variation of shot distance, or to dispense with acting altogether for limited periods as the camera turns itself loose onto the world). In *Nada,* the contradictory status of characterization — a conceptual theatricality undercut by the professional intensity brought to the playing — initiates a complicated set of allegiances. The whole thing is extremely neat. By taking in the first place as subject matter a group of anarchists, Chabrol does everything he can to ensure that he is dealing with a system of values as far as possible removed from the norms and expectations of the audience (the bourgeois audience, as it might be characterized elesewhere). He then proceeds by a series of cunning narrative manoeuvres and deftly placed gratifications to make the audience identify with a group dedicated, after all, with a certain intransigence, to its (the audience's) destruction.

Part of the problem is that we simply get to know them — better, at any rate, than the television news service which after the raid consistently mis-identifies the group, so that we feel an urge to *put them right.* Scrutinized closely — the cinema's privilege — the group reveal unexpected personal attributes and tendernesses. It turns out, for instance, that for all his mastery and self-confidence in other fields, Diaz has not been able to persuade Veronique to sleep with him, although it is implied that he wants to. After some initial sparring, Veronique accepts Epaulard as her lover instead; in the build up to this there is a scene where they drive to Paris at night to post the manifesto announcing the kidnapping. In order to get back they must pass a police road-block which entails them acting as if they were a married couple. The enforced contiguity — perhaps no more than mildly erotic — coupled with the suspence of the police stopping them acts as a typical device for putting *us* in their position, as if to tempt us to forget the moral alternatives thrown up by rigorously following through their ideological stand. Similarly, the violent truculence of Treuffais becomes a positive courage under the brutality inflicted by Goemond and his gang (strange moment where shackled to the radiator within Goemond's kicking distance, he breaks into a defiantly mis-sung version of Blake's "The Sick Rose"). Treuffais's doubts about the kidnapping enterprise, which lead to his withdrawing from the plans, retrospectively soften the moral self-righteousness or the group, introducing a certain ambiguity of motive which the audience seizes upon to *make allowances.* The scene in the car with Epaulard and Veronique is paralleled by the scene in which Diaz and D'Arey break out of the farmhouse in a suicide dash for safety. Here the interspersed cutting of shots from the outside — including aerial shots which show us the disposition of the police and by extension give us the odds, so to speak, on their succeeding — with subjectively plotted camera shots

from the inside of the car signalling their determination, provides an obvious, classical instance in the film of encouraging audience identification.

The models for this procedure are to be found in the American cinema, to whose traditions and protocols Chabrol is obviously indebted (as which commercial filmmaker is not?). As in any number of Hitchcock movies, the moral complicity of the audience with the actions portrayed on screen is revealed in all its uneasiness when we are vicariously invited to judge violence — or to administer it. The complicated series of revenges in *Nada* gives Chabrol's desire to play on this uneasiness full scope. Against the killing of the Ambassador by Diaz, we are forced to place Goemond's shooting of the girl in cold blood (a close-up of her eyes distended in surprise accuses us, the audience, of this mean satisfaction); similarly, Goemond's casual cruelty to the dying Epaulard — he crushes him in the ribs as Epualard lies paralysed with a broken back — demands to be set against the fact that for his revenge, Diaz carefully saws off the barrels of a shotgun to make his opponent's death even more brutal. The result of this meticulous — and malicious — balancing of sympathies emerges as a highly abstract discourse about distance and involvement which might be characterised precisely as on investigation of the morality of spectacle. As if to make the point quite explicit, Chabrol provides a twist to the scene of the kidnapping of the ambassador. It turns out that the brothel has been under surveillance by the police for some time, and we are shown an agent filming the group as they arrive from an upstairs window across the street. When events take a turn for the worse — motorcycle police turn up on the scene as the group are making their getaway and there is a short fracas during which D'Arey kills one of them with his catapult — the agent far from doing anything to help his injured collegues, sits back and rubs his hands with amusement before biting into his evening sandwich. Like Godard in his films of the 60's *(Masculin-Feminin* notably), Chabrol poses the aesthetic problems which interest him — above all, problems of *engagement* and *holding off* — in terms of an elegant and extended visual joke.

This seems to me a possible way of making a political film. It is not the only way of course. Godard — since he has been cited — in a film like *La Chinoise* (1967), a film which has certain similarities of subject matter with *Nada,* uses a whole battery of devices — stills, titling, cinema-verite style interviews, an aleatory fragmentation of narrative etc. — to provide a multiplicity of perspective unavailable to what is characterised as the "flawless realism" of the commercial cinema. (One might contrast the way Chabrol and Godard deal with the member of the group who falls out: the status of Treuffais's apologia is determined by its being chanelled straight back into the plot, whereas the scepticism of Henry (Michel Semeniako) in Godard's film functions — like Anna Wiazemsky's interview with Francis Jeanson — to situate his comments not only inside but outside the aesthetic boundaries of the film. We are excused from agreeing or disagreeing with Treuffais's politics, whereas Henry's comments seem to be deprived of an essential layer of fiction and must be answered directly; significantly, half the characters in *La Chinoise* keep their own names.) The commercial cinema, to which, for the sake of argument Chabrol belongs, and against which, equally, Godard in a film like *La Chinoise* is making a stand, is forced to deal with political issues as moral dramas, to the annoyance of doctrinaire critics of the left. It is arguable that if this is the case, it is necessary to infuse the complicated strands of the plot with something of the vigour, the guile and the obliqueness of Chabrol or Hitchcock. It is at *this* level that the film may be said to operate politically, rather than at the level of simply possessing a "political" subject matter like that of Costa-Gavras in *Z* or *State of Siege.* In fact, as it stands the choice of subject is relatively unimportant, which only adds an extra level of irony (as a kind of gleeful *opportunity for misunderstanding)* to certain films — Hitchcock's *Topaz* and *Torn Curtain, Losey's Assasination of Trotsky, Nada* itself among them — which happen to be about the confrontation of contemporary political ideologies. The priorities of the matter are such that a film must work as art before it can work as politics — that is, if it wishes to last. Otherwise one is left with such liberal statements of allegiance as *State of Siege,* artistically banal, serving no other purpose than a gesture of solidarity — which, it is only fair to add, may after all have its place somewhere.

Of course, this is to put a certain value on the lastingness of a work of art which it is not necessary to subscribe to. There are strong arguments in favour of the position that art should be provisional, strategic — and useful. In this perspective subtlety itself is no longer the self-evident virtue it was. There is a polemical directness in this type of political art which, as a by-product, preempts and dismisses the kind of criticism which sees itself as impartial and elucidatory. One suspects that in Brecht, for instance, criticism is deflected in the forceful transparent lucidity of the plays themselves. But then the drama must posses the strong qualities of simplicity rather than the weak and evasive ones. What is at stake is the notion of a political intelligence which has enough strength not to fub aesthetic issues. One feels in *State of Siege* that the failure of lucidity lies between intention and effect: Costa-Gavras *meant* to do one thing and ended up doing something different. A potentially interesting political confrontation between two sides becomes a dull moral confrontation between two individuals, and dull because all the elements of the equation are *given,* — residing, if one likes, in the very faces of the opponents Yves Montand and Jean-Luc Bideau. Such *desinvolture* becomes carelessness. Costa-Gavras is caught between endorsing the morals of his protagonists and qualifying them. The qualifications are not those of irony but of uneasiness. *State of Siege* in the end lacks simply the confidence of all good art, including Chabrol's.

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What does it mean to talk about the "flawless realism" of a film by Chabrol? The camerawork — by Jean Rabier — and the art work — by Guy Littaye and Henry Berger — are responsible for an immaculacy that, as in the later films of Bunuel, is itself problematic. Chabrol dislocates everything except the imperturbable suavity of his camera, which continues to efface itself into transparency while converting everything it gazes upon into something beautiful. This is the legacy of Hollywood — Hollywood's professionalism — but it also of course inevitably expresses an ideological position. There are some for whom Chabrol's elegance leaves him open to changes of bad faith, so that the question about flairless realism could be rephrased to ask, what does it mean, what political obtuseness does it imply, to continue making films now in the way that Hollywood, or Hitchcock, was making films fifteen years ago? This seems to me a hostile but a pertinent question especially when couched in the sophicated rhetoric of the marxist-leninist *débat.* It is probably not something that can be answered outside the specific political argument in which it is formulated, but one or two points can be made. *Nada* is taken from a novel by Jean-Patrick Manchette, and thus places itself within the tradition of run-of-the-mill Hollywood adaptations, in contrast to the premium placed on originality which with a few exceptions (for example Joseph Losey) is the distinctive mark of the European art cinema. Chabrol's preference, however, works all to his advantage, in the sense that he seems to grasp instinctively the strengths of a certain tradition of *anonymity,* in contrast to the always threatening and portentous gravity of the European director's personal "statement" (Bergman, Antonioni). Where European directors approach each film as its own exercise in form, Chabrol has long felt at ease within the constraints of genre — bastardised certainly, by nonetheless providing a vocabulary of known narrative ruses. In sum, there is an interesting play in Chabrol between the notion of an intellectual, auteur-oriented cinema and a more popular, impersonal and commercial tradition. In the pull of these forces the status of films — like Bunuel's — remains ambiguous, ironic and hard to pin down, all of which finally has its own polemical value. This elusiveness, to get back to Chabrol's literary preoccupations, is one of the rewards of a romanesque temperament. For such an exercise in strategy and style, the odd thing is that *Nada* should be in many ways so passionate. Yet there are superb shots — the palace suddenly illuminated against the night sky, the wheat field swirling in the wind after the car crash — which suggest that as in Hitchcock a classical, cerebral mise-en-scene does not preclude a liking for resonant emotional passages.

Mark Le Fanu

An interview with Dusan Makavejev

Floating the ark: but the cities remain standing

The interview published here was written for the 19th Pula Film Festival in August 1972. The interview itself and the review by Lorenzo Codelli which follows it wittily and obliquely take up some of the points made earlier in this issue; notably the extent to which a certain type of cinematic spectacle possesses the overriding value of baffling the spectator's desire for clear-cut meaning. Codelli juggles with the notion of "message" in Sweet Movie *(or* Sweet Doom,*) but it is only to illustrate an elliptical, fragmented field of possibilities in Makavejev's film, (against which he places the more monolithically ideological exordium of current Hollywood: "We must build".) The obliqueness and wit of the two articles are, like the formal attributes of the movies that are talked about, a function of rapid movement and juxtaposition. The notion of "play" which this entails has been held against Makavejev in the past — notably in* WR: Mysteries of the Organism *— as evidence of "irresponsibility" (the desire always to know where a film stands on such and such a topic), but it is in reality no more than the cinema has always offered. The immemorial components of eroticism and violence (and in particular, eroticism in violence) are always there to contradict the message which may importunately have survived the early stages during which the movie was planned and sketched out. Once more the visual, gestural, phatic emphasis of the completed movie serves to undermine whatever original and paraphrasable purpose it may have once possessed. Makavejev, in the interview, has a mass of opinions, but the blitheness and gaiety with which they are thrown out and bounce off each other suggests a metaphorical and "hesitated" reading of their literalness. Makavejev's is an irony which protects the fact that like any artist worth bothering about his opinions are experimental and provisional. So much is obvious enough. Spectacle in his hand is the instument par excellence of combatting dogma (hence his brilliant and subversive use of propaganda footage). But equally to the point, his movies throw into relief a "reading" of cinema, almost a sociology of cinema, that* Monogram *has always been interested in. It is the sense in which, defined as* popular culture, *cinema invokes the spectre of manipulation, voyeurism, market demand, "fantasy." A simultaneous* mistrust *of its power, and* endorsement *of its subversive value in unlocking chained up fantasies hovers round the question of whether the cinema is a progressive art. The subject matter of Makavejev's movies stretching right back into the thirties is coterminous with the whole history of cinema's ideological complicity as a "mass medium". Against the strident denouncements of cinema that one finds in Adorno and Benjamin, and residually in the scepticism of Bertolt Brecht, one might provisionally place a more egregious* exploration *of its effects in the work of Reich and Makavejev. Finally, Codelli's brief article is exemplary in dealing with a less auteur-oriented Hollywood than one is used to in these pages — notably the blockbusting "disaster" movies of recent months, whose aesthetic and ideological manoeuvres are contrasted to Makavejev in a number of interesting ways.* Sweet Movie, *incidentally, according to our lates information has still to find a distributor here.*

— DURING THE LAST YEAR OR SO, YOUR FILM *WR — THE MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM* COMPETED UNDER THE YUGOSLAV FLAG AT 12 WORLD FESTIVALS.

DO YOU NOW FEEL LIKE A CHAMPION PLAYER WHO IS SITTING IT OUT BEHIND THE TOUCHLINES?

— When you play a dirty game, you must take time out once in a while.

— WHAT IS THE LOWDOWN ON YOUR NEW PROJECT?

— The name — A SWEET MOVIE; genre — erotic comedy with a slight off-flavour of anti-psychiatry; starring in principal roles — Milena Dravic; the idea, scenario, screenplay, editing, direction, additional dialogues — Dusan Makavejev; producer — DUNAV FILM, headed by director Vicko

Raspor; executive production — a dynamic group within DUNAV FILM, led by Aca Stojanović and Dejan Djurković; assistant -director Bojana Marjan-Makavejev; shooting is done mostly in Yugoslavia and a little elsewhere, too, it all depends; the advertising slogan — TRY ME, I'M DELICIOUS!; filming to begin at the end of September 1972; the first sound copy — middle of 1973; the world premiere — May 1973, Cannes.

— PLEASE EXPLAIN THE "EROTIC COMEDY". AREN'T ALL YOUR FILMS EROTIC, AND AREN'T YOU ALREADY TIRED OF COMEDY?

— Do you remember that beautiful old Ukrainian man in Dovzhenkov's *The Earth,* lying on a magnificent bed of apples? He eats an apple and dies. I suppose Eros is something juicy, something to do with life.

— I have an impression that comedy happens somehow by itself, it comes unbid. Even now, look what I have inadvertently stepped into. I happened to mention the Ukrainian old man, and there I notch one up for Veljko Bulajić who at the time of the mass movement used to spread the "reliable" report about me to the effect that I was a Ukrainian Jew, (supposed to be known for their anti-communism.) So that's just my luck; I go for apples and I come up with a rotten one... Do you remember Charlie Chaplin happily rolling blindfolded on his roller skates along the edge of a precipice?

THIS LOOKS MORE LIKE PSYCHIATRY THAN COMEDY.

— That's what I mean by "with a slight off-flavour..." The English psychiatrist, Ron Laing, says that our civilization represses not only our instincts and sexuality but also *"every possible form of transcendence"*. Men with an experience of other dimensions, says Laing, constantly risk being destroyed or are forced to deny themselves. Here he does not only mean lunatics but also poets, inventors, visionaries of all types. Let's not think that it only happens somewhere else, where a union of writers passes a pistol to Mayakovski. We, too, have planted that tree for Branko Miljković in Zagreb[1]).

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"In the context of the present day madness, which imbues everything and which we describe as normality, health, freedom, whatever we call on becomes ambiguous and uncertain." — Ronald Laing.

It is easy for us to say that people in London must think that way, because look at all the things they do to the Irish in the name of their Queen and democracy.

However, I don't want to jump to any conclusions. Miljković, so sensitive to a "Very strong word", instead of having the dialogue with the tree could well have gone to have a glass of beer; Mayakovski could well have become a children's writer, or a writer of encyclopeadic historical novels like so many others. I am on the side of life, which, as we know, in each case lasts until the dying day. I love to see people waxing enthusiastic and nostalgic about *Bonnie and Clyde* while at the same time calling for the death penalty against similar young and savage outlaws operating among ourselves.

The latest hit in Atelje 212 is *The Wounded Eagle,* in which young Petrović, Ckalja's son, plays the love-smitten airforce officer, and everyone is rolling in the aisles with laughter while at the same time my practically closest neighbour airforce officer Desimir Kojić, makes a bloody massacre of his wife, child and mother-in-law... How to piece together the broken fragments of the *same* picture? When crowds pushed in fascination to see Sefka[2] and dozens of women started dreaming about marrying Nail[3] strange and irrational energies were released, and they are certainly worth looking into. Remember also the amazing story that Sefka and Nail were going to get married! It is about things of this kind in this country that books are printed, poems are written and records mass produced, but our pigeon-breasted academic culture hardly notices this creativeness, these public prayers, these grandiose projections of human needs and dreams!

*

— DO YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT WE ARE OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE PEOPLE?

— Look here, have you heard the hit song (now banned) about the death of the Bulgarian football players, or another best selling hit record, "Boy, Am I stupid"? (I met the writer of this song at Morko Klarin's wedding in the Jugoslavija Hotel.)

In most of our films we have no stupid, no jealous, no hungry nor indeed happy people. People don't try very hard, don't kill themselves, they just sit around tables and talk. It does not pay to be concrete. Look at the ending of Vuk Babi's film *The Burden.* Its conclusion is — it is better not to buy a motorbike.

— WHOM WILL YOU BE ATTACKING IN A SWEET MOVIE?

— SWEET MOVIE will expect the audiences to exercise and sharpen certain senses which are rather seldom used. In this respect it usefully promotes the programme of all-national defence, because it makes people prepared.

— WHY IS YOUR PROJECT LIKENED TO SWEET AND SOUR PORK?

— Because the combination of apparently disparate elements is a culinary art which we intend to follow respectfully in our film.

— WALKING ON A TIGHTROPE AS A HOBBY?

— For many people, to do anything odd is to leap into the void. I hope to make a film that will be a manual for leaping into abysses, spaces beyond our familiar ken. Why should we only experience strange things in our dreams? A SWEET MOVIE will not be afraid of looking like a dream and will permit itself many oddities. It hopes to fling you from horror into joy and then again, quite unexpectedly to jerk tears out of you.

— WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY STARRING MILENA "IN LEADING ROLES"?

— SWEET MOVIE will use the models of *The Three Faces of Eve* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* developing them in the direction of all life pleasures.

— SO YOU WILL BE MAKING FUN OF THE CLASSICS?

— When Eve White and Eve Black, to use the actual instance, begin with terrible headaches to fuse into a new personality named Jane, this reintegration and this civic peace are truly pathetic, producing a cute, Peyton Place Frankenstein. Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (do you remember the superb Frederick March growing hirsute before our very eyes, his teeth protruding out of his lecherously drooling mouth?) have more healthy evil and life in them, but the poor beggars lack humour. Bourgeois literature's eros about the emergence of a new man is all too tenebrous, chilly, scared. Everything is tense, feverish, doomed in a Faustian manner; the scenarist's main preoccupation is how to produce real thunder and to conceal a false moustache. In other words a transfusion of humour into the diseased arteries of classicism.

— IT LOOKS AS IF THE FILM WILL BE NON-POLITICAL?

— As non-political as a glass of milk, as an orange, as summer shit studded with cherry pips. All these are political events.

Whether they are of a special social significance is quite another question.

— DOES THIS MEAN THAT MILENA PLAYS A SCHIZOPHRENIC?

— Milena's role in this film is exceptionally difficult and satisfying. There would be no charm at all if we were to pin a label to her behaviour, and diagnose it as schizophrenic, paranoic, manic-obsessive or some other behaviour. The diagnosis of the character played by Milena is — absolute normality. Milena's job is to create three possible personages which unexpectedly, but not without an internal logic, melt into one another, then into a third, then back again into the first, always at random and always highly convincingly, horrifyingly or amusingly, depending on what conditions we are dealing with.

We shall make use of all the possible clinical knowledge and experience, but always with the basic idea that the pathological picture in question is that of normalcy.

— DOES THIS MEAN THAT THE PATHOLOGY OF NORMALITY IS TO BE CONDEMNED IN YOUR FILM?

— On the contrary, it will be forgiven, for it knows not what it does.

— HOW ARE MILENA'S CHARACTERS NAMED?

— Ruby Goldigger, a high-society lady, or more accurately, a high-class harlot, who lives a life of luxury as a confidence trickster and smuggler. Her lumpen-proletarian alter-ego (or alter-id, or perhaps alter-super-ego), Ethyl Barfly, nicknamed Luxemburg, is a declassée alcoholic and profligate, whose origins nobody knows. She is often seen at Zmaiko's bar and around the railway station. Whenever she gets into trouble with the law, her mysterious protector, Sweet Dickie Mytipric takes her in his Citroen-Maserati to Jasmin House of Beauty, where she gets a perfumed bubble bath and changes her cosmetic and spiritual looks. Anesthesia Blank-Blank, an anonymous non-person, lost in the corridors of the Laza Lazarević mental hospital, receives all the best medicines in the world, but her contact with the outside world is interrupted until her encounter with her healer, Dr. Marcus Herbert, the creative antipsychiatrist, who with his special method provokes an explosion of health.

— WHAT IS HER REAL NAME?

— It hasn't been decided yet.

— WHAT IS SO ENJOYABLE ABOUT A SWEET MOVIE?

— It is *music* to the tongue and a *juicy treat* to the eyes.

— WILL YOU ENTER IT AT THE NEXT PULA FILM FESTIVAL?

— I have been informed that secret talks are under way among sane forces for the final liquidation of Yugoslav film. Instead of an unnecessary Yugoslav film review, next year's Pula will present an edyfying retrospective of two stars: Liubov Orlova and Shirley Temple.

I am looking forward to seeing this programme.

is there life on earth? makavejev's phantoms of liberty

Carole Laure in Sweet Movie

"Do you remember Charlie Chaplin happily rolling blindfolded on his roller skates along the edge of a precipice?" These words of Makavejev contain more or less the essence of *Sweet Movie*. The reference to Chaplin and to *Modern Times* is illuminating: Chaplin is scandalous in that film because he manages to amuse himself, and us, while he is working. The place of work, the assembly line, the restaurant, the department store, all are transformed into stages where games are played, and which subvert their social functions. Precipices are dear to Chaplin, who inherited them from Sennett: the greater the danger, the more comic the situation becomes. In the house which slides into the ravine in *The Gold Rush*, the danger compresses into a few feverish minutes almost the entire history of mankind, or rather its entire struggle for survival. The ship in *Sweet Movie* is called "Survival", and sails over waters which are almost too calm.

It would be difficult to image the disasters or threats of disaster of *The Poseidon Adventure, Juggernaut* or other films of catastrophe happening on the "Survival". The former films tend to place man in competition with the machines which he has made; to stave off disaster or survive it is simply a question of humanising technology. The technological propaganda is not even concealed: we must build lower skyscrapers *(The Towering Inferno)*, we must build safer aeroplanes *(Airport 75)*, we must build solider cities *(Earthquake)*: the message is always *we must build*. All disasters serve towards this laudable end. On the "Survival", on the contrary, Anna Planeta, the Captain, plans and wreaks destruction from within, a destruction as slow as the progress of the ship. And the ship is conceived as an enormous flower, sweet and carnivorous, which draws into itself the victims of hope.

The dead of the past (the graves of Katyn) are associated with the victims of today; mass extermination may be turned against itself: thus in the documentary sequences of Katyn the Nazis become the "goodies", they themselves film an extermination committed by their enemies, and, offer this as a spectacle of propaganda (just as their adversaries were later to do by filming the Nazi Lagers). The corpse as protagonist is an idée fixe of Makavejev; in *W. R.* the severed head of Milena Dravic; in *Love Affair* the dissected body of the telephonist; in *Innocence Unprotected* the old film which rises from its own ashes. Like the erect phallus which is "frozen" by the appearance of Stalin his corpses are in a state of hibernation. To reanimate the old film of Aleksic, in *Innocence Unprotected,* Makavejev subjects it to a process of historicisation, from which we deduce that the charges of "pro-Nazism" against the acrobat-director were completely mistaken; in fact he was prefiguring the liberation of his country in his film; and so he is restored to life.

The sweet death of Miss World in the bath of chocolate is an indifferent death, filmed for advertising purposes and set up like a spectacle. Bunuel subjects us to a similar game in *Le phantôme de la Liberté:* while the mass exterminator fires from above, we contemplate innocuous snatches of everyday reality, of people passing by. Knowing that someone is going to be hit, the game is to guess who it will be. It is a brilliant reflection on indifference to the spectacle of death; and the conclusion of the episode, where the condemned man goes scot-free, is a more than logical consequence. Both Bunuel and Makavejev invert the terms of the scandalous: there is nothing pornographic or non-representable any more, and the film actually tends to rediscover the lost sense in the attempts to open new horizons for what may be represented.

Makavejev's montage of juxtapositions and Bunuel's inter-connective chain are processes which hover around sense, rather than expressing it, they envelop it, they surround it and then they abandon it. The structure is in continual tension and the effects of surprise load it with tension. Bunuel has each character introduced to the others with the conventions of

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1) **Branco Miljkovic, a young Serbian poet of some repute, was found hanging in Zagreb from a very low tree a few years ago.**

2) and 3) **Sefka and Nail commited some of the most heinous crimes against their families and closest friends.**

bourgeois greeting. The members of the Commune in *Sweet Movie,* after the therapeutic party, gather to sing the Internationale — a well-ordered group. The phantom of liberty appears more visible in these moments of calm, or orthodox passage; it is the harbinger of a new *order,* not the perpetuation of an already existing disorder.

Makavejev exalts schizophrenia: Miss World and Anna Planeta, Reich yesterday and the Reichians today, Aleksic yesterday and Aleksic today, the protagonists are doubles: theses and antitheses. The "third personality" planned for Milena Dravic in the project for "Sweet Movie" was lost, because the Utopian synthesis was disrupted by the exile of Makavejev himself. The forced synthesis of the emigré is the schizophrenic condition par excellence, from Chaplin to Billy Wilder, through Polanski, Lubitsch, Forman and dozens more. The despair of one who sees neither a homeland nor an adopted homeland can lead to the cosmic pessimism of Lang, to the sublime nihilism of *Ninotschka,* to the individualistic subversion of *One, Two, Three;* right from its title this undervalued masterpiece of Wilder's proposed the East, the West and its own monstrous synthesis, a fusion of the worst in both systems which then dominates the world. Makavejev tries to denounce this kind of fusion and proclaims an alternative of a tactical nature: the sweetness of the film, as a consolation for today, as a taste extended to the other senses for tomorrow.

That's Entertainment uses technical and narrative procedures typical of Makavejev to affirm a truth which is negated by his films, that is, that all beauty and sweetness were in the past and cannot be repeated; the film from MGM is an industrial communiqué which takes its place with many others that fill the financial pages and the front pages of newspapers. "We must build" — as we were saying — but we must also take cognisance of the black gravity of the moment, of the productive catastrophe that faces us. The order to "produce entertainment" takes on more and more military tones, and the rush towards entertainment is programmed to evoke the great depressions of the past: the queues of unemployed and the queues at the cinema entrances. The overload of illusory sweetness nourishes the already overcharged ideology of catastrophe. Thus it becomes more and more urgent to *answer* the question in the song from *Sweet Movie:* "Is there life on the Earth?"

Lorenzo Codelli

(translated by Cormac O Cuilleanain)

UNDER WESTERN EYES: VARIATIONS ON A GENRE

1. 'dodge city' and the development of the western

Dodge City, directed by Michel Curtiz in 1939, is a seminal film in the development of the Western, yet it has been strangely neglected — it does not even figure on Andre Bazin's list of important Westerns of 1939-40, the period when it is generally accepted that the Western took on a second lease of life, after languishing with the coming of sound (nor is it mentioned in Bogdanovich's discussion of the best films of 1939). Yet there are many strong reasons for thinking that Curtiz, rather than Ford, was the prime mover in this rebirth of the Western and that *Dodge City* rather than *Stagecoach* set the pattern for its future development. At the time the film was made Curtiz was one of the most active, syccessful and stylistycally influential directors working in Hollywood. He has already made over forty features for Warners and had played an important part establishing them as a major studio and now plunged into making Westerns in a big way, producing *Dodge City, Virginia City* and *The Santa Fe Trail* right along side his other major successes, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex, The Sea Hawk* and *Casablanca.* Curtiz was now at the peak of his career and was operating with strong studio support. He had major box office stars in Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland, had composers like Korngold and Max Steiner working on the musical scores and had technical support at the highest level. Unlike *Stagecoach,* which was shot in black and white, *Dodge City* is a technicolor print of astonishingly high quality (Sol Polito was responsible for the photography), which presents a pictorial panorama of the sights and spectacles of the old West, with a verve and splendour that has scarely been equalled since. *Dodge City* is enjoyable simply as a travelogue and vivid recreation of the past — at this point the West is something more than a Hollywood convention or collection of time-worn studio sets.

Moreover, it is no derogation of *Stagecoach* but rather a recognition of the film's outstanding quality to point out that precisely because of its classic simplicity, clarity of outline and economy of structure it represented a formula that could not easily be varied or have changes rung on it in the traditional Hollywood manner. *Stagecoach* could not serve as an influence or create a genre, it could only be copied. The very perfection that Bazin invokes is also the reason why the film remains something of a dead end. On the other hand, it is the very openness of *Dodge City,* the sheer multiplicity, verging on redundance, of its thematic and iconographical material that leaves open the possibility of rearticulation and rephrasing, so that new meanings can be generated through the positioning and relative weighting of different screenplay is a kind of cinematic source-book of the West: it creates a narrative, in a manner that is perhaps characteristic of the historical novel, that attempts to incorporate virtually all of the institutions and icons of the cowboy era. We are shown the stage-coach, the steam-locomotive, buffalo hunters, a cattle drive, lynchings, saloons and gambling halls, the temperance league, a children's picnic, the covered wagons, a barber's shop, a cattle auction, a funeral at Boot Hill, a pioneer newspaper, a cattle stampede, a bar-room brawl. Without these things, obviously, there would be no Western. By the same token, it is a necessary condition of the Western fable that it incorporate as much as possible of this iconographical material into a structure that is logical and avoids excessive redundancy and which will be aesthetically satisfying insofar as it achieves this goal. A synchronic picture of life in the West is built up diachronically through the unfolding of the narrative. However, it should be added that an element of redundancy is *necessary;* so that the picture appears to be independent of the fable and not funtionally subordinated to it; and vice versa. In *Dodge City* the scenes of life on the cattle drive are not strictly necessary to the plot; they are there primarily to complete the canvas of Western experience.

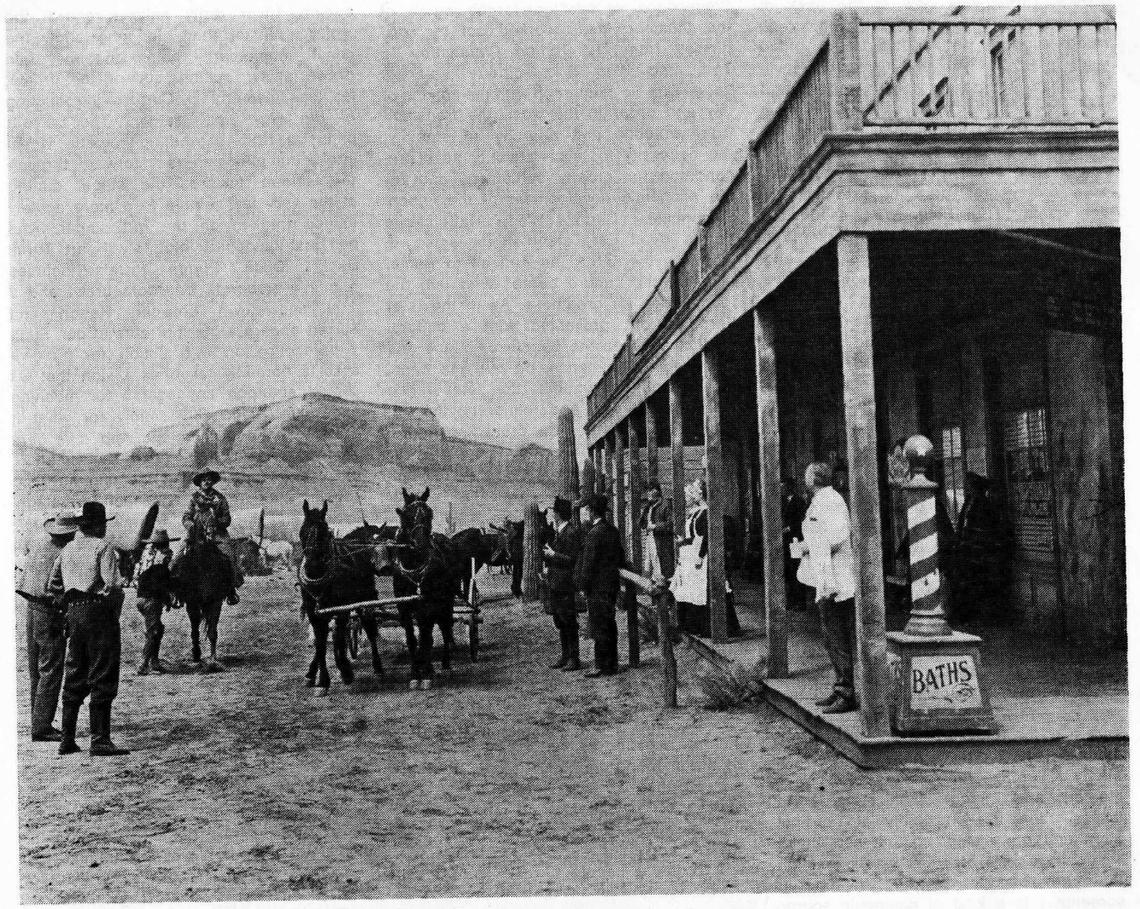
Moreover, it is to *Dodge City* rather than to *Stagecoach* we must look for the source of the thematic ideas worked out by Ford himself from *My Darling Clementine* to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance. Dodge City* is concerned with the coming of law and order in the west, the transition from violence and anarchy to stability; the necessity for such stability as a precondition for orderly settlement and for the economic development of the nation. Symbolically Curtiz's Wade Hatton and Ford's Wyatt Earp stand in the same relation to the U.S.A. as Aeneas to Rome, they are the culture heroes who laid the foundations for greatness. As in the later Ford we are presented with a cultural conflict between the people of peace and the people of violence; on the one hand, the school, the chapel, the temperance hall, the women and children, the responsible citizenry, the crusading newspaper; on the other, the saloon, the gaming tables the lynch mobs, the unscrupulous profiteers, the hired gun. *Dodge City* develops through a series of escalating conflicts between these two sections which is reinforced by the personalised hostility of their respective leaders, Wade Hatton, the sheriff, and Jeff Surrett, the owner of the Gay Lady saloon. The threat to the peaceable citizenry is shown successively, by the spilling over of a brawl in the Gay Lady into a meeting of the ladies of the Pure Prairie League next door, the disruption of a children's picnic by gunplay in the street, by the shooting of Joe Clemens, the newspaper owner, as he sits at his desk. The impact of the scenes is intensified by the fact that they involve a violation of these people's living space. It is clear that ordinary people are not safe either in the street, or in their usual centres of work and social life. Hatton and Surrett are not simply individuals, they bring to focus a conflict between different groups and divergent values and life styles, which must be resolved one way or another.

Curtiz is justifiably known as a director who specialises in presenting his audience with the maximum of action and spectacle. The story is pursued from multiple aspects simultaneously, highly compressed informative montage sequences fan out into expertly staged action set-pieces, episode spills over into episode without a pause through the use of unending wipes and dissolves. *Dodge City* opens with a spectacular race between stage-coach and locomotive. Curtiz cuts from the stage scene from inside the train to a reverse angle foregrounding the stage with the train in the background. There follows a complex montage sequence in which the repetition of certain parallel elements: the stage driver lashing the horses/fireman filling the boiler; close-up on train wheels/galloping hooves is subtly transformed by articulating them logically rather than analogically. The final sequence functionally differentiates between stage coach and locomotive and denies the dramatic equivalence that has been established by showing first the stage driver urging on his team, their galloping hooves; then flame from the boiler, wheels turning, the engine driver lazily pulls a chord, the whistle blasts, then, in long shot, the coach momentarily gains and the train draws away, pulling out of the frame. No less masterly is Curtiz's introduction of the Gay Lady saloon. The camera pans up from a whirling roulette wheel into a complex pan-track forward through the saloon towards the stage, cutting at the very last minute to a more acutely angled track-in on the girl singer, who has just launched into "My Heart Turns Back to Dixie." *Dodge City* also includes a highly elaborate bar-room brawl and a final show-down between Hatton and Surrett aboard a blazing railroad car. Such a preoccupation with action for its own sake is normally taken as a sign that we should abandon any search for meaning and take *Dodge City* simply for what it is i.e. good entertainment. And it is certainly the case that, taken in isolation, the various episodes in the film have no specific meaning: a stagecoach is a stagecoach and a bar-room brawl is a bar-room brawl. Nevertheless it will be argued that in *Dodge City,* as in art in general, meaning is generated by the way in which these episodes are linked, stressed and inflected, and, that virtually every single detail in *Dodge City* can be shown to have a precise significance. The Western, like the Oedipus story, is a bundle of elements, where what is sayable through it is determined by the way in which they are presented and placed in relation to one another. In the Oedipus story the components are — swollen foot, exposure on hillside, murder of father, solving the riddle of the Sphinx, marriage to mother, plague, blinding, banishment. Versions of the story incorporate linking interpretations (by the oracle) and are subject to further interpretation either through the attribution of causality or suppression of causality at various points in the narrative. Different episodes may appear either as functionally necessary or as symbolically appropriate. The unending task is the attempt to generate meaning, even where the meaning may have been forgotten, like a person who attempts to reconstruct a sentence when only the nouns remain. Or, as Levi-Strauss puts it, in *The Savage Mind:*

> "Mythical thought for its part is imprisoned in the events and experiences which it never tires of ordering and re-ordering in its search to find them a meaning."

Since this analysis of *Dodge City* will be worked out in some detail it may help the reader to begin with a brief summary of events in narrative sequence.

The film opens with the first run of the transcontinental railroad as far as Dodge City, with Colonel Dodge and the railway executive aboard. Wade Hatton, who has been killing buffalo for the railroad company, confronts Jeff Surrett, whom he has reported to the Federal authorities for killing buffalo without a license. Col. Dodge is shown making a speech about the virtues of civilisation — but this is followed by a montage sequence which shows the breakdown of law and order. Matt Cole has sold a large head of cattle to Surrett, but when he demands pay-



The frontier township: Tombstone in Ford's My Darling Clementine

ment he is gunned down in the Gay Lady saloon, by Yancey, Surrett's gunman. At Cole's funeral a warrant is served on Yancey but Surrett and his men ride out of town with the sheriff in a hearse. Hatton (Erroll Flynn) meets Abbie Irving (Olivia de Havilland) on the cattle drive to Dodge City, but is forced to kill her brother Lee in self-defence, after Lee has attempted to cause a cattle stampede. Arriving in Dodge City Hatton again has a confrontation with Surrett in the barber's shop. At auction Hatton refuses to sell his cattle to Surrett, the highest bidder, but makes a separate agreement with Jack Orth, who promises cash. Orth is killed by Yancey. A brawl between Southerners and Northerners causes extensive damage in the Gay Lady. Surrett attempts to have Hatton's friend lynched as a scapegoat. Hatton prevents this, marches Surrett to the sheriff's office — only to find it has been closed. Hatton refuses to take on the job of sheriff himself, but changes his mind when Matt Cole's boy is killed as the result of an outbreak of violence. Hatton attempts to clean up Dodge City by banning firearms, street shooting and gambling after hours. The increased orderliness encourages many new settlers. When Mrs. Cole is forced to sell her house, since she still has not received any money from Surrett, Hatton, Abbie and Joe Clemens, the newspaperman, determine to challenge Surrett's story that Cole lost the money at roulette. Clemens is killed by Yancey but Hatton forces a fellow-gambler at the saloon to provide vital evidence of his guilt. Hatton prevents the lynching of Yancey by driving him out of town and putting him on the train for Wichita. Also on board are Abbie and Surrett, who, for different reasons, have left town for their own safety. The train catches fire; Surrett and his men make to escape on horseback, but are shot down by Hatton. With law and order now established in Dodge City, Hatton, at the invitation of Colonel Dodge, leaves with Abbie for a similar assignment in Virginia City.

For the purpose of analysis the story of *Dodge City* can be broken down into three distinct mythological sets: one concerned with gansterism and the problem of urban violence, one centering on national economic development and the idea of progress, and one concerned with the "reluctant hero."

Urban Violence and Gangsterism

A convenient distinction is often made, in discussions of the American cinema, between the gangster movie, which presents the city and its problems, on the one hand; and the Western which deals with rural America and the frontier. However, it will be argued here that such a presentation is highly over-simplified, if not altogether false. *Dodge City* is heavily encoded in terms of the gangsterism, lawlessness and organised crime that affected American cities in the twenties and the thirties. Dodge City is one of the largest centres of population in the West and it is described in the film as

> "Longhorn cattle center of the world and wide-open Babylon of the American frontier... packed with settlers, thieves and gunmen."

Here the term "wide open" was one that was applied to many American cities in the Prohibition period; and meant that they were open to the operation of organised crime. Similarly the statement by Dr. Fleming — "We're the public disgrace of America" and Colonel Dodge's later reference to Virginia City — "The city is teeming with crime and corruption" broach the familiar theme, from Lincoln Steffens onwards of "the Shame of the Cities." It is important to note the implications of this line of thought: the responsibility for keeping the city clean does not remain purely with an appointed marshall or with the Federal government, it depends on the vigilance and public spiritedness of the citizens themselves. If the city is lawless it is *their* disgrace.

Jeff Surrett is obviously identifiable as a gangster boss. His ownership of the profitable Gay Lady saloon, with its alcohol, gambling and girls reflects the stranglehold which organised crime achieved over speakeasies and illegal liquor sales, prostitution and the numbers racket. With the growth of crime syndicates violence became increasingly abstract: killings were performed by a subordinate or contract killer. Similarly Surrett never guns down his victims but has this done by his gunman, Yancey. Surrett builds up his empire through violence and intimidation; acquiring cattle not through legitimate purchase, but by shooting the vendor. Surrett boasts of the vast sums he makes annually ($ 100,000) through his ownership of the Gay Lady; like Capone he is able to exploit people's need for a little relaxation and entertainment. The conflict between prohibitionists and bootleggers is reflected in *Dodge City* by the opposition to Surret from the Pure Prairie League. Much of the deviousness of gang battles inflects many details of the film. Instead of the straightforward main street showdown Curtiz shows men shooting through windows into the street. Yancey shoots his victims in the back. A hearse is twice used to get people out of town unnoticed. Surrett like Capone gets out of town, when the heat is on, and goes to nearby Spearville; as his lawyer says

> "Jeff's smart enough to know this town's going to be a little warm for a few days so he's just kind of laying low until the excitement blows over."

As in the contemporary gangster movies the struggle against anarchic forces is carried on through an alliance between law-enforcement agencies and a crusading popular press (Joe Clemens); with the story of success spelled out in successive banner headlines — i.e.

> "DODGE CITY WILL BE CLEANED UP"
> "STREET SHOOTING MUST STOP SAYS NEW SHERIFF"
> "DODGE CITY'S CLEAN-UP DRAWS NEW SETTLERS: LAW AND ORDER IN COMMAND."

Since it was often difficult to obtain conclusive evidence against gangland leaders — with income tax evasion notoriously the only charge which the government could pin on Capone — the problem of obtaining evidence against Surrett and Yancey assumes great importance in the film. Clemens is shown compiling a dossier on Surrett's activities and Surrett's accounts are examined. The presence of printing ink on Yancey's hands points to his responsibility for Clemens' murder but the problem of getting witnesses to testify is highlighted when Hatton has to pressurise a fellow gambler into reversing his former statement, that Yancey did not leave the Gay Lady at the time the murder was committed.

Lynching was a continuing social problem in the thirties (though its incidence sharply declined in the early forties after the film was made) and *Dodge City,* like *Fury* and *Young Mr. Lincoln* recognises this through the inclusion of two attemted lynchings and a third that is presented in a montage sequence.

In 1939 there was a widespread feeling that organised crime had been brought under control. The F.B.I. had been the source of many encouraging statements, and, among other things, the year saw the death of Al Capone. Like Walsh's *The Roaring Twenties,* Curtiz's *Dodge City* expressed a widely felt sense that the era of violence was over. But perhaps *Dodge City* can convey this all the more convincingly because it is set in the more distant past. A great part of the significance of the historical genre is that it can provide this sense of an ending. For, in truth, there can never be any endings in the present; for optimism may be false and conclusions premature — especially about crime, which is a continuing social phenomenon. So our sense of an ending, which is, more properly, the des-re for an ending, can be more poetically expressed through images drawn from the past: with peaceful settlers singing hymns in the quiet streets of Dodge City, as Erroll Flynn and Olivia de Havilland set out for Virginia City, and the covered wagons roll off, suffused in the rich glow of a Western sunset.

Building a Nation and the Idea of Progress

Dodge City articulates a clear parallel between the America of the post-Civil War era and the America of the Depression. Just as after the Civil War a wounded and exhausted nation sets about the tasks of reconstruction, economic development and expansion; so after the catastrophe of the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and mass unemployment the nation looks to Roosevelt and the New Deal to restore American prosperity. *Dodge City* is organised around the idea of progress — the technical and economic progress that will get America out of her difficulties. The very first image of *Dodge City* presents this in concentrated form: a head-on shot of a splendid gleaming locomotive and over it superimposed the legend:

> "Kansas 1866. The civil war has ended. Armies disband — the nation turns to the building of the West."

This image is doubly reinforced by the triumph of the train over the stagecoach,

The cattle auction in Dodge City

for even in this victory the audience is conscious of the still superior technology that has replaced and is replacing it. Thus the dynamic men who sit aboard the train are those who have a visionary consciousness of America's historic destiny:

> "Gentlemen, that's a symbol of America's future — iron men and iron horses, you can't beat them!"

Such a man, above all, is Colonel Dodge, introduced in Dodge City as "the man who made this progress possible." Looking far beyond present realities and exigencies Colonel Dodge annouces:

> "I can see a great metropolis of homes, churches and schools, a fine, decent city, which will become the flower of the prairie."

The Alliance between Dodge, the civic leader, and the railway executives who build the railroad, both of which are necessary for each other — since the railroad needs the trade in cattle, Dodge City the communications — symbolises the need for government and industry to work together under the programme of the New Deal in order to bring prosperity for all. In fact the picture reproduces two of the main ideological defences of capitalism in the thirties — i.e. that it contributes to economic development and that it provides employment. Here one thinks of Wade Hatton and his men waving a friendly goodbye to the railroad: "There goes our meal-ticket for the last six months." The fundamental distinction made in the film is between those, like Dodge and his friends, who are helping to build a nation and those like Surrett, who rip off profit for themselves and who have no constructive purpose. Here, the distinction made about buffalo hunting at the beginning of the movie is of great importance: Hatton is licensed to slaughter buffalo by the government to enable the company to build its railroad; Surrett on the other hand kills for his own profit and deprives the Indians of their sustenance and livelihood. (No mention of the fact that the building of the railroads was probably the major factor in the elimination of the buffalo from the North American continent). On the one hand, the creators and builders, on the other the destroyers. These meanings are brought together in the final showdown between Hatton and Surrett aboard the train. The train, symbol of progress, is threatened by the outbreak of anarchy — the flaming railroad car — which must be contained. Moreover this represents the uncontrolled and destructive use of power — unlike the flaming boiler of the locomotive at the beginning of the movie which shows power brought under control and used in the service of progress. Symbolically Surrett and his friends are all those who are sabotaging the New Deal.

The Reluctant Hero

In *Dodge City,* as in many other Western movies, great emphasis is placed on the reluctance of Wade Hatton to assume the post of sheriff and to take action against "the undesirable element." He twice refuses the invitation and only takes on the job when the pressure has become absolutely overwhelming. In effect, it takes four deaths to bring him to this point. Hatton's own killing of Abbie Irving's brother places him under a sense of moral obligation to Abbie and her family, which is one factor. Then there is the death of Matt Cole and subsequently of Jack Orth, with whom Wade Hatton has made an agreement to sell the cattle. In addition there is the escalating series of personal confrontations between Wade and Surrett — over the buffalo, in the barber's shop over Rusty's right to have a bath, at the auction, Surrett's attempted lynching of Rusty. But it is only when all the threads come together — in the death of the boy, Harry Cole, friend of Abbie and son of the murdered man that Wade Hatton is finally persuaded. Curtiz emotively signals the transition with a zoom in on Harry's sheriff's badge, and a cut to Hatton buckling on a belt carrying the Sheriff's star.

This theme of the reluctant hero is important in American culture in that it is clearly the bearer of many complex cultural messages . In part it expresses a traditional American distrust of authority and of processes of institutionalisation. Characteristically the protagonist in the Western takes over the job of sheriff or marshall only under specific circumstances, for specific reasons and for specific lengths of time. When the emergency is over that has called for his assumption of authority he lays down his badge and leaves town. Equally, Americans value restlessness, energy, new challenges, the pioneer spirit. Thus, Wade Hatton is described as "the most movin' on man you ever saw", a man who has travelled and fought all over the world and who is reluctant to be tied down. Appropriately, at the end of the movie, he is not content with resting on his laurels, but sets out once more to face the fresh challenge of Virginia City. But for the man to do this on his own would be selfish and irresponsible: it is necessary for Abbie to endorse the project that Wade secretly desires. In addition there is the emphasis in American society on *homo economicus:* the individual is only concerned with following his own self-interest which he defines in a very narrow way and will not be drawn into matters which he does not regard as being strictly his concern. This cuts both ways: he will not get entangled in other' peoples arguments, but he will also solve his own problems and not ask for outside assistance. Paradoxically, the integrity of the American hero is defined by the fact that he is not moved by ideals and will only do things for money (eg. many roles played by Humphrey Bogart and Clint Eastwood; also *The Professionals).* He avoids binding agreements and permanent alliances in favour of temporary pacts and strictly delimited once-for-all deals.

However, perhaps the most important aspects of the reluctant hero is the way in which he conveys a national self image. Americans regard their country as one that is patient, reluctant to respond to provocation, slow to anger, but one which will not hesitate to respond when the threat is genuine and when the emergency is critical. This reluctance has either symbolically or actually characterised the most important episodes in American history. The American colonists were unwilling to take steps against the mother country despite the undoubted justification they possessed in the policies of George III. Lincoln was reluctant to plunge his country into a destructive Civil War and only took action against the South when it was clear that there was no other alternative. Woodrow Wilson had no wish to get involved in a European war and only entered World War I in 1917, when it appeared, or was made to appear, that neutrality was no longer a possible option. The figure of the reluctant hero, as embodied by Wade Hatton in *Dodge City,* is therefore a complex and composite cultural image, communicating both individualistic values and a sense of American national identity.

Dodge City and the Post-War Western

Dodge City is sufficiently different from the pattern of many Westerns made in the years immediately following World War II to make comparative analysis fruitful and to permit the development of hypotheses about the nature of the re-articulation in meaning and structure that occurred. To begin with, the theme of the coming of civilisation and the establishment or re-establishment of law and order persists, but, since organised crime is no longer felt to constitute a significant problem, the encoding in terms of gangsterism is suppressed. This is characteristic of mythic structures in general, they survive and outlive the specific historical circumstances that contributed to their formulation and which gave them a high degree of precision, and what they are about, in any but the most general terms, is more or less lost sight of. As Lévi-Strauss points out in his study of "The Story of Asdiwal", in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism:*

> "When a mythical schema is transmitted from one population to another, and there exist differences of language, social organisation or way of life which make the myth difficult to communicate, it begins to become impoverished and confused."

By post-war standards the ending of *Dodge City* is disappointing. Instead of a personalised main street confrontation between hero and villain, Hatton uses a Winchester to shoot down Surret and his men from their horses — as if they were Indians! In the context of *Dodge City* and the climate of opinion in the thirties this is symbolically appropriate — in keeping with the whole Hoover terminology of "rats" and "public enemies." Criminals must not be dignified or glorified but must be seen as the contemptible enemies and outcasts that they are. So Yancey and Surrett are shot down far from the eyes of any audience, in a scene that is deliberately without resonance. This, in turn, points to the significance of such a resonance in the re-articulation of meaning in the post-war Western.

During World War II the Western temporalily dropped out of sight. After the war, war movies were very popular and Westerns also began to attract a large audience. Part of this appeal may have been due to the fact that Westerns appeared as war films under another guise. For many people were tired of the war and wished to forget it and the Western offered many of the same satisfactions in an intriguingly different guise: it was likewise an "action" genre with plenty of shooting and violence, where friend and enemy, good guy and bad guy, were clearly distinguished. By 1950, the Western was the major sector of Hollywood production, with over one hundred features reaching the screen. Generalisations obviously involve a certain risk when such a vast range of movies is involved. Many films involved the relation between white men and Indians and some even presented the Indian point of view sympathetically. Others presented conflicts between cattle men and homesteaders, personalised rivalries of cattle drives or wagon trains, the careers of outlaws and border raiders, the exploration of the West. Nevertheless it is true to say that quite a large number of Westerns, especially following 1950, did follow the pattern (already present in *Dodge City)* of an escalating conflict between hero and villain, but which (unlike *Dodge City)* culminates in a main street shoot-out. It is this pattern I want to discuss and, in particular, to suggest that it constitutes a rearticulation of the mythic structure of the Western, away from domestic problems and towards a form of discourse concerned with international relations and the cold war.

Although this type of Western is well known it may be as well to enumerate some of its principal features, since it is an assumption of the method of analysis adopted here that all such details are significant:

1. Great emphasis is placed on the self-reliance of the hero. He seldom finds or looks for assistance from others — if he received aid at all it is usually only from a small band of fellow professionals. *(Rio Bravo).*

   This is very different from *Dodge City,* where, very much in the spirit of the New Deal, and the Thirties, it is *leadership* that is stressed. Hatton has support, but he provides the leadership that has been lacking.
2. The confrontation between hero and villain is highly personalised and both appear as being on a higher level than the other characters — they have a samurai character.
3. The action is set in a small and relatively peaceful Western town.
4. The threat to peace invariably comes from without. Gunmen ride into town and start to shoot up the place. They kill or intimidate peaceful citizens and threaten to drive them from their homes or property.
5. The action follows an escalation scenario, in which the hero often ignores an initial provocation, but is forced to respond both forcefully and appropriately when it appears that the threat is real.
6. Poker becomes an important metaphor for the action of the movie. The hero must be ready to call his opponents bluff — i.e. by challenging him to draw or to commit himself, but at the same time must be ready to bluff himself until assistance is at hand or until circumstances can be turned to his advantage.

These features closely correspond to the nature of the tension and international conflict between the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union after World War II. It is important to recognise the centrality of the idea of the "reluctant hero" in the mythic rearticulation, since it is not merely a matter of how Americans view themselves but also a matter of how they will be viewed by the others. In the post-war period both America and Russia are Superpowers, they stand on a different level from the others. Moreover the contries of Western Europe are exhausted by war: when the chips are down they cannot be relied on for assistance. America must rely on herself and her technological hardware (A bomb, B 52s, missiles) to defend herself. Moreover the notion that the U.S.A. is "a reluctant hero" is a definite liability in relation to her new power and obligations. There is a very definite risk indeed that Stalin will assume that American statements about defending the "free world" will not be taken seriously. A hawkish posture, by Dulles, is necessary to undo the damage and potential weakness created by the image of American reluctance. Thus, in the post-war Western the reluctant hero is also a self-reliant hero: great pains are taken to demonstrate that his reluctance to move or to get involved must not be construed as lack of nerve. The gradual escalation of violence in the Western closely corresponds to the scenarios of the Rand Corporation, in which it is always important to respond with closely calculated counter-measures, that always leave further strategic options in reserve. This is not to say that the escalation scenario of the Western is copied from the cold war, for it clearly precedes it — rather it is a pre-existing element that can be used to re-articulate the Western in terms of the problems confronting America in the post-war world.

Similarly poker becomes an important metaphor since, in keeping with the new American mood of realism, it demands a cool assessment of one's own hand and characters of others (unlike, for example, Woodrow Wilson). It is necessary to know whether others really will do what they say or whether threats (bluffs) are to be taken at their face value. In her foreign policy it was necessary for the U.S.A. to continually think in such terms. America called Stalin's bluff over Berlin with the Berlin Airlift (graduated response), proving that he was not prepared to go to war over this issue. But America also showed that she herself was not bluffing by her readiness to go to war in defence of South Korea. Again the importance of the main street duel, lies in the fact that it can articulate meanings about the cold war: — America boldly and courageously confronts evil (the menace of international Communism) before the eyes of the whole world (for it is important in the Western that everyone should be watching) and thus asserts her manhood. The hero wins even though he draws last (nuclear counter-strike capability, massive retaliation through strategic air command or missiles).

The more we examine the small town milieu of the Western the more it appears that it is dictated not so much by the banal criterion of verisimilitude (i.e. that most Western towns were small). For many other details of the Western are not convincing in these terms — Dodge City for example was cleaned up by deputies using Winchesters, which outranged the sixguns of ordinary cowpunchers and were considerably more accurate, yet it is virtually axiomatic in the Western that hero and villain shall confront one another on the same conditions. Nor does it seem probable that the small Western town represents any very convincing image of rural America. Rather the small town context seems dictated by the need to clarify and rearticulate the message of the Western: to show that it now deals with America's relation to the world, in which the small town appears as a fitting image of a peaceful and peace-loving America, that asks for nothing more than to be allowed to carry on with its own affairs, but which finds itself living under the threat of a violence that no longer stems from within, but which comes from *without* — a menace that is essentially external and alien. Even the very abstractness of the Western in this period, its deliberate avoidance of a historical flavour, is a way of signalling the contemporaneity of its message. Yet its "timeless" character was an illusion to which we can no longer easily subscribe and the Western has itself moved on to new constellations of meaning: the futility of Vietnam, the diminished role of America in the world, the doubtfulness of her own moral purposes. Recently the theme of the pointless quest, worked out in such movies as Peckinpah's *Major Dundee* and *The Wild Bunch* and in Monte Heliman's *The Shooting* has assumed a central importance not least because of the new mood of scepticism which it reflects. Consequently it would appear that the characteristic iconography and structure of the post-war Western was determined by the overriding need for clarity of communication. Mythemes are redistributed primarily so that the mythology once again can have something to say. Otherwise the Western would lose its immediate relevance and appeal and would be little more than a residue from the past, simultaneously as expressive and futile as a silver bullet. Mythological patterns are universal only in so far as they lend themselves to restructuring; the Western is syntactically rich, not because it conveys some timeless truth or intrinsic meaning, but because of its suppleness and flexibility; through the facility with which its mythic components can be reassembled into new forms that respond to the urgency of the present. The Western is a formula that *formulates* — articulating problems, contingencies, hopes and fears; that touches, by its very precision, on the deepest emotional chords.

David Morse

A clear severity of style: Santiago (Arthur Kennedy) and Maria (Betta St. John) in a pastoral interlude from The Naked Dawn

2. the case of edgar g. ulmer

The question of German directors in Hollywood is a vexing one. Sometimes what is meant by a 'Germanic flavour' is a sense of fate (as in Fritz Lang's case), sometimes it is a decorative quality (often loosely described as 'baroque': cf. Sternberg, Ophuls, Sirk . .), sometimes it is a mixture of metaphysics and visual style, also referred to as 'Expressionism.' Then again there is the 'Berliner' side of things as opposed to the 'Viennese': Biedermeier rather than baroque, with sexual innuendo and guffaws (Lubitsch; Wilder?). One of the main problems is that the imaginary geography of *idées reçues* (which sometimes happen to be genre conventions as well) is often at variance with the historical data we have on directors of German background. German background. To give but a few examples: for some time Stroheim fooled everybody (because they wanted to be fooled) and had them believe he was Count Erich Maria Stroheim von Nordenwald; the fact that he had the same kind of social and ethnic background as Josef 'von' Sternberg obviously casts a slightly different light on his films, removes them a step further from the naive conception of an 'autobiography.' As far as Sternberg himself is concerned, it should be remembered that he came to America much earlier in his life than Stroheim, and one might wonder, from a historical, rather than an aesthetic, viewpoint, whether he is to be considered a Viennese at all. Preminger for one is sick and tired of references to his 'Viennese' back-ground and has made it known he hates Vienna, *A Royal Scandal* or *The Cardinal* notwithstanding. Conversely, Max Ophuls, whose name critics have so often associated with the Hapsburg capital, may have loved the city, but had more to do with Paris, Hamburg or Berlin. Caution, therefore, is called for, and we must distinguish between (presumably unconscious) signs of the director's background, his (conscious) reaction to this background, and his (conscious) reference to Germanic traditions in which he was not himself brought up.

It is also necessary to add a further nuance to the issue by looking at it from the American point of view. One does not need to be German-born in order to be attracted by real or imagined 'Germanic' qualities; witness Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (which Pauline Kael, obsessed as she is by historical evidence, insists on crediting to Peter Lorre via Gregg Toland!). What is also true is that blends of backgrounds and traditions are sometimes achieved, and the result is so smooth that it becomes pointless to ask who or what is responsible for what components: here I am thinking in particular of the Deanna Durbin films directed by Henry Koster (Hermann Kosterlitz). They have a very moving, entertaining and successful quality of *Kitsch* which I would be hard put to ascribe to America alone or to Germany alone. As a cross-reference, one might ask the same question about Allan Dwan's *Heidi*. In both cases the material (American in Deanna Durbin's case, German Swiss in *Heidi's)* and the treatment (a German: Koster; a Canadian: Dwan) are geographically heterogeneous, stylistically they seem to be made for each other.

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If we turn to Edgar G. Ulmer, we find some striking historical evidence: Ulmer worked under Murnau on no fewer than seven films: *The Last Laugh* (1924), *Tartuffe* (1925), *Faust* (1926), *Sunrise* (1927), *The Four Devils* (1929), *City Girl* (1929) and *Tabu* (1931). But, firstly, is Murnau as Germanic as Domarchi has claimed, or is he not universal? *Sunrise,* although signed by Murnau and Carl Mayer, and based on a piece of German literature, sums up the whole *international* achievement of the silent cinema (whereas *The Last Laugh,* which may aim at a universal language through lack of titles, is very dated indeed by German expressionism). The specifically Germanic elements in Murnau are turned into something universal in the same way as specifically American elements become universal in King Vidor's films. This is no vague comment on the appeal of these films, but rather a reflection of what Murnau and Vidor successfully set out to do. Now, it is obvious that Ulmer has been influenced by Murnau's 'universal' ambitions; but he has turned Murnau's universals, Murnau's archetypes, into allegories — allegories of themselves. Such is the point I would like to make about two of Ulmer's most accomplished films, *The Naked Dawn* (1954) and *The Cavern (Neunzig Nächte und ein Tag / Sette contro la morte,* 1965). These films could both be described as 'heavily symbolic' (a German sense of fate?), were it not for the fact that their 'symbols' seem to have neither *signified,* nor *referent,* apart from themselves.

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The Naked Dawn is regarded as one of Ulmer's best films. A Universal-International production, it is a film with little action, slow pace, mostly philosophizing about the essentials of life between three main characters: Santiago (Arthur Kennedy), an outlaw; Manuel (Eugene Iglesias), a poor Indian peasant, and Maria (Betta St. John), Manuel's wife. Hence an impression of Kammerspiel, of theatre in camera. Ulmer's concern is not so much to describe the conflicts between Santiago's way of life and Manuel's as to emphasize the basic similarity of their plights. The viewer keeps asking himself which of the two men is more miserable than the other. Santiago is no romantic figure: at the beginning of the film, he loses his friend and associate *Vicente when they steal watches from a* train. He is not independent since, in order to get paid for the stolen merchandise, he is at the mercy of a corrupt customs officer. Having fought for the money, he goes to spend it in a bar and gets into a brawl, nearly losing everything again. The bunch of money proves tempting to Manuel, who thinks of killing Santiago. (This is the theme of the basic similarity: "Manuel learns quick"; "Santiago taught Manuel"; etc.). Finally the customs officer seeks revenge, and, failing to lay hands on Santiago, he seizes Manuel. Santiago kills the officer but is himself mortally wounded.

Thus there is no escape for the outlaw. The ending is neatly reminiscent of the beginning of the film: Vicente's death, with Santiago acting as friend and priest, prefigures Santiago's own death. At the end of the film Santiago's own words to Vicente are heard again off screen: "and the gates of Heaven will swing wide open . . ." etc. A circular structure: a sense of fate. No escape is possible, but, had it been possible, it would have been equally pitiful: after Santiago has talked to Maria in glowing terms about "Vera Cruz... the women of Vera Cruz... the dancers of Vera Cruz," Maria asks him to take her with him. Santiago then denounces in the strongest terms the romanticism he had indulged in, implying that Vera Cruz would be no different from the brawl witnessed earlier on. Characters have symmetrical illusions about one another: to Manuel and Maria, Santiago *is* a romantic figure, dangerous but fascinating; at the same time, Santiago is obviously sensitive to the prosaic domestic qualities of Manuel and Maria's life. They are poetic to him, by contrast.

Ulmer stresses the material starkness of the peasant couple and has them flee at the end of the film, not a very hopeful ending even though they are apparently reconciled, since all they now have between them is one horse, and they have had to abandon their piece of land, their house which was "better than the house of the patron" because it was theirs. The difference between *Sunrise* and *The Naked Dawn* is summed up by the 'nakedness' in Ulmer's title. Nevertheless, it is true that, in purely visual terms, the spectator's point of view must coincide with Santiago's, as Ulmer dwells on the 'prose poetry' of the house and the girl. Simple gestures: she is seen taking a jug of water, undressing and having a shower (there is a striking shot of her naked legs with a hen absent-mindedly passing by); finally she puts on a blouse and skirt. Earlier on there had been the sequence of Santiago's introduction to the poor house, with the crucifix at the place of honour, the piglets, Maria making tortillas and wearing a cross on her breast. (The cross is a leitmotiv in the film, the first example being the one on Vincente's tomb, close to a cactus which itself resembles a twisted cross. Again, at the end of the film, the tree where the customs officer wants to hang Manuel, looks like a cross. Mortally wounded, Arthur Kennedy leans against the trunk of a tree . . . These crosses and *skeleton trees are emblems of the desert* and barrenness, whereas Betta St. John is associated with water and fertility: she is first seen by a pond; cf. also the scene with the water running from the jug.) But, unlike what happens in most American films, such 'symbols' are not found as one (not immediately apparent) thread among many, as an implicit text beneath (or within) the apparent (diegetic) film. With Ulmer, the difference is minimal, the film itself is really nothing but a sequence of archetypes. The archetypal quality of the visual element is reinforced by the use of voices off, and 'folklore' (i.e.., typically 'Mexican') programmatic music which systematically underlines the action. If *The Naked Dawn* were more traditional, more respectful of the conventions of action films, Westerns, etc., this effect would appear very clumsy; as it happens, it further establishes the 'abstract' quality of the film, it contributes to the overall impression we have of watching a ceremonial which is strongly hieratic, yet does not refer to any hereafter, for which there is no available 'key' symbolic, yet, paradoxically, signifying nothing. In other words, Ulmer's films appear rather similar to Miklos Jancso's (cf. in particular *The Technique* and *The Rite).*

This is confirmed by *The Cavern,* which will remain Ulmer"s last film, since he died in 1972. There are more characters in *The Cavern* than in *The Naked Dawn,* but this is compensated by the fact that the characters are prisoners in a cave. Thus there is the same sense of a puppet theatre, of pitiful examples of humanity being manipulated by a director who is not all-powerful, who is himself dependent on Fate, but wears the indifferent mask of Fate. The scene is Italy in September, 1944. Imprisoned in the cavern following an explosion is a group consisting of: an Italian shepherdess (Anna / Rossana Schiaffino), her Italian boy-friend (Mario / Nino Castelnuovo), two Americans: Joe Kramer (John Saxon) and Captain Wilson, a Canadian (Lieutenant Carter), an Englishman (General Braithwaite / Brian Aherne), and their German prisoner (Hans). The film then proceeds (again at a very slow, deliberate tempo) to show the shifting relationships between the members of the group. Conflicts arise for a multiplicity of reasons: Anna's presence and especially the fact that she and Joe are immediately drawn to each other, inciting Mario's and Wilson's jealousy; national differences; various hidden character defects (Wilson is an alcoholic; so is Braithwaite, who is no 'retired general' as he implies; etc.). *Several escape attempts are made, whose* inventiveness is matched only by Ulmer's inventiveness in foiling them. Carter and Mario spend much time and effort digging a tunnel and they finally break into . . . the lower part of the cavern, where Hans is also busy looking for an escape (the irony of the situation is punctuated by the noise of a falling drop of water in the echoing cavern). Then the trapped men build a dam in order to use the bed of the underground river as an exit; the sequence is full of *references to the myth of Theseus:* the river is a maze; Joe is tied up to a rope which is handed over to him by Anna (Ariadne); the water pursues him, furiously beating against the wooden dam like a bull in a ring against a talanquera (the Minotaur). All Saxon finds this time is another, smaller cavern. Later, after the Christmas party, the first human casualty occurs: Wilson, the drunkard, drowns. Hans, by himself, finds a way to the outside world, he climbs up a kind of a well (and the music soars in mounting expectation), actually gets out, blinded by the light of the sun. The eagle and swastika of his uniform are picked out by a zoom, subsequently explained by the presence of Italian partisans watching through binoculars; they shoot Hans. As the sun sets, he crawl back into the cavern, but dies without the others finding him or hearing his cries for help. (Another piece of irony is that, when they first ask where Hans has gone, somebody says: "It's that German efficiency" — he is being thorough in his research ...). A fresh escape attempt is made by Carter. Like Joe earlier on, he tries to use the underground river as an exit, he wears a gasmask and air is being pumped into a pipe. The pipe breaks against a rock; like a dismembeed puppet, Carter falls along a succession of cascades and at last, ironically, reaches the open sky, riding the mane of a gigantic cascade. Here the irony is underlined by Joe's telling Mario to "keep on pumping" *after* we have seen the pipe break against the rock. The irony, however, is somewhat superficial, since it is also implied that Carter has willingly sacrificed himself for the sake of Joe and Anna. Before he leaves, he gives Joe a ring which had belonged to his wife, and which Joe is supposed to give Anna. Finally, a sense of ritual is emphasized, as Carter introduces himself and his attempt as if he were a conjurer and Mario his assistant.

Now that only four survivors are left out of seven, they are going mad and justify John Belton's description of Ulmer's characters as 'prisoners of paranoia.' After 152 days in the cavern, one of the characters explaims, "We're all turning crazy." Later, Mario attacks Joe, and Joe comments: "We're all crazy." Gen. Braithwaite does lose his mind, but his very madness provides an unexpected means of liberation: he threatens to blow up the place with a grenade, the stocked ammunitions are blown up and a conflagration is started; at the same time, one sees an opening in the cavern, Mario and Anna come out, carrying Joe, while one hears Brian Aherne's *voice off* "God said — let there

be light ... and God saw the light — and it was good."

The light / darknes opposition of the film as a whole, and of its ending in particular, is so fundamental yet obvious that it hardly symbolizes anything except itself. Certainly, it would be possible to argue that the cavern is a metaphor for the dark forces of the human psyche, for madness; it would then appear that the only escape from madness is through madness, (i.e. what is symbolized by Brian Aherne's character, if we consider that the 'Seven against Death' are but one persona). "In *The Cavern,* the characters' original sense of entrapment in the cave increases with each failure to find a way out of it until the cavern itself begins to represent the physical embodiment of the characters' inner turbulence, fear, paranoia, and insanity."[1])

More important in our opinion, are the ritualized attempts at survival even within the context of the cavern, of madness. Witness Carter's self-introduction as a conjurer; the passing on of the ring; earlier on, the reading of the Book of Genesis by Brian Aherne (taken up again at the end), accompanied by tracks forward on the walls and stalagmites of the cavern, a new creation of the world taking place under our eyes (in this sense, the cavern is, quite simply, our world, not a dark world which would stand opposed to a world of light). From the point of view of ritual, there is, above all, the long scene of the Christmes party. Mario manages to make a Christmas tree, Hans plays 'Silent Night, Holy Night' on the harmonica and gives all the others flutes which he has succeded in carving. They all drink punch, eat Anna's pet goat, roasted. Mario presents Anna with a necklace he has made. The celebration finishes with a sing song, ethnic differences are forgotten, a toast to peace is made. Mario is seen as the resourceful Homo Faber, the German as the musician / poet. Alcohol is shared; but madness takes over again when the General gets up, wants to take his leave, and thanks everybody for an excellent Christmas dinner: "All good things must come to an end" etc. It is also at the conclusion of the party that Wilson goes off by himself, taking some bottles, and is subsequently drowned.

A sense of ritual and a sense of symbolism are ever present in *The Cavern,* but they must of necessity baffle 'archetypal' criticism, since the ritual, the symbolism, do not refer to anything beyond themselves. The lyricism of a number of scenes inside the cavern (mostly early scenes with Rossana Schiaffino and her goat) is not even nostalgically reminiscent of the 'outside world.' It is true that these scenes occur before madness sets in, that a progression does take place in the film as a whole; nevertheless, such scenes are not absent from the second part of the film (the turning point being the Christmas party). The prevalent feeling is that the cavern is not so much an allegory of 'the world', as a world, complete in itself, both deeply individual and profoundly similar to any number of possible worlds. It is not surprising that Ulmer should have directed a version of *L'Atlantide* (1961). Entrapment and liberation are relative, they are simply the entrance into, and exit from, a given world, complete unto itself. The scenes which show Rossana Schiaffino washing herself are very reminiscent of Betta St. John's scenes in *The Naked Dawn.* Anna washes, stripped to the waist, and hums a song, unaware of Wilson's watching presence on the other side of the water. Sensuously she washes her legs at exactly the same time as (in another part of the 'underworld') Brian Aherne has a fit: 'indifferent' juxtaposition of a world which includes both sensuous poetry and convulsive madness. Later, there is a beautiful love scene between Anna and Joe. The sequence opens with a shot of the same setting: a cascade, a lake, Rossana Schiaffino and her goat, John Saxon nearby. Then Anna and Joe are found in a part of the cavern which looks like an oratory; the sound of organ music accompanies shots of Schiaffino's fingers caressing the stalagmites (the stalagmites are the candles of the circular cavern's oratory; they are also obvious phallic 'symbols' — indexes of themselves, rather). This is followed by a shot of John Saxon's fingers upon Schiaffino's; they kiss. Schiaffino's beautifully white, sculptural face is seen to splendid effect.

Throughout *The Cavern,* visual and musical style has a ritualistic quality first thanks to the slow, deliberate use of 'monotonous' images (this is to be taken in the literal, musical sense) and thanks to the matching use of unrealistic music, punctuations of solos played on the organ, on the flute and drums, or on the bass. Mention must be made, as well as of Carlo Rustichelli's music, of Gabor Pogany's photography (is he a relation of Art Nouveau draughtsman, later Hollywood art director Willy Pogany?). Though it received very scant critical attention when first released, Ulmer's *The Cavern,* a German-Italian production, is the fitting enigmatic epilogue to a highly individual, largely confidential career, whose path has crossed the path of Hollywood without ever really merging with it. If *Ruthless* (1948), with its sophisticated flashback structure, is quite typical of many productions of the forties, *The Strange Woman* (1945) is far wilder than most romantic dramas of the time; the coldness and decorative archness of *The Black Cat* (1934) put it poles apart from the standard horror film of the thirties. One does find the same quality of 'symbols without an external referent' elsewhere than in *The Naked Dawn* (again, highly atypical as a 'Mexican' Western) or *The Cavern:* in Arch Obolers *Five* (1951) for instance — a film which has little to do with Hollywood, but has, like Ulmer's, works, the distinction of being American *cinéma de poesie* outside of the epic mode. The prosody of Ulmer's films has the stamp of the soliloquy about it; it does not re-echo elsewhere in Hollywood.

Jean-Loup Bourget

[1]) John Belton, "Prisoners of Paranoia", "The Velvet Light Trap (Madison, Wisconsin), No. 5 (Summer 1972), p.19, col.1.

Book Review

Visions of Yesterday
By Jeffrey Richards
Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1973 (£5.50).

Visions of Yesterday is a description and analysis of three cinemas which Jeffrey Richards regards as exponents of three right-wing ideologies. The bulk of the text is devoted to "The Cinema of Empire," the Empire being British but the films being American as often as English. The following sections give an account of "The Cinema of Populism," with brief chapters on Capra, McCarey and Ford; and of "The Cinema of National Socialism." I shall restrict myself for the most part to the "Imperial" chapters as they are both the most satisfying and the most original. As Richards himself says, "with populism and Nazism, I am examining cinematic genres on which some research has already been done (. . .). But in looking at the Imperial cinema, I am entering virgin territory, tentatively feeling out the lines of the genre" (p. xvi).

To explain away populism as a "right-wing ideology," and Capra and McCarey as spokesmen of populism, is questionable enough. To treat John Ford according to the same standard seems almost perverse, although the reappraisal of *The Hurricane* is very welcome. To state that Ford and Capra "stand head and shoulders above" McCarey (p. xvi; cf. p. 254) is rather rash: even if one accepts the fashionable view that Ford stands head and shoulders above everybody else, deciding between Capra and McCarey is surely a matter of personal taste.

The final chapter, on the Nazi cinema, is sound enough. One is simply sorry to see Richards join the crowd who thinks Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* "spell-binding" (p. 295). Am I the only one to find it pompously dull?

In other words, Richards is at his most illuminating when discussing the films he knows best and is obviously most partial to. To go back to the Imperial cinema, he is primarily concerned with the explicit ideologies conveyed by the films and with the conscious propagandist aims of the film-makers. He points out that the cinema of Empire was steeped in the literature of Kipling, Buchan, Edgar Wallace, Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, Burroughs (Tarzan was an English lord). But he also pays attention to *film as film,* in particular to the incarnation of imperialist myths in the pipe-smoking, mustachioed faces of such actors as Ronald Colman, C. Aubrey Smith, David Niven et al. This cinema produced a large number of visually exciting films, from Ford's *Lost Patrol* to Cukor's *Bhowani Junction,* from Wellman's *Beau Geste* to Saville's *Kim.*

It is obviously possible to quibble with Richards on many points of detail. For example, since he thinks it fit to include the French Foreign Legion, why does he leave out Sternberg's *Morocco?* Also, parody and irony are given scant attention: there is no mention of Laurel and Hardy's *Bonnie Scotland,* which takes them to India, nor of Lubitsch's use of Herbert Marshall and C. Aubrey Smith against the type in *Trouble in Paradise,* nor of the opening of Blake Edwards's *The Party,* a parody of *Gunga Din.* This is a pity, both because parody might have helped Richards define the patterns typical of the genre, and because it begs the question of the extent to which Imperial films were taken seriously by the general public. It might also have given Richards an intimation of an interesting element which he fails to remark on: even though most American films fit easily into the Imperialist framework, some ambiguity could occur in the relationship between America and Britain, as it certainly does in the relationship between America and the British monarchy.

In "The Golden Crown and the Silver Screen" *(Cambridge Review,* October 1974), Jeffrey Richards attacks the semiological school of cinema criticism and argues in favour of the method he used in *Vision of Yesterday.* He applies it to another body of films, "The Cinema of Monarchy," with its "ritual enactments of monarchical superiority." "Films," he says, "could be made both in Britain and the United States about British monarchy — for in both cases, monarchy served as a useful metaphor for established authority" (p. 10). True often enough. Yet Hollywood made films about Parnell (Stahl) or Joan of Arc (Fleming) which, at least by implication, do not show the English/British monarchy at its best. One may also mention Ford's *Mary of Scotland,* or Curtiz's *Captain Blood,* in which the eponymous hero is sent by his King to the West Indies and slavery for having nursed a bunch of rebels. A film mentioned by Richards himself, Preminger's *Forever Amber,* closes on a shot of Linda Darnell (the King's abandoned mistress) watching as her former true love (Cornel Wilde) and their child wander off in the general direction of Virginia. The Virgin Land of America and the hope it represents are explicitly opposed to "the sickness of the age" and the decadence of the English monarchy (cf. George Sanders's foppish portrayal of Charles II). The Anglo-saxon solidarity and the myth of monarchy Richards refers to were often undermined by, or clashed with, the myth of America, the land of youth, opportunities and equality, in contradistinction to the Old Continent, stricken with social and political paralysis. In such cases the British monarchy is as much a metaphor for repressive authority as the Napoleonic (cf. LeRoy's *Anthony Adverse)* or the Austrian Mexican (cf. Dieterle's *Juarez).*

It may be worth examining how Richards' approach relates to the ideological "deconstruction" along the lines of *Cahiers du Cinéma* on *Young Mr Lincoln.* Apparently the methods are poles apart. I have mentioned Richards's anger and impatience with the semiologists ("they are in danger of choking their ideas to death under the multi-layered cotton wool of linguistics-inspired jargon," *(Cambridge Review,* p. 10). Conversely, what *Screen* wrote about John M. Smith on Hitchcock applies perfectly to Jeffrey Richards on the cinema of Empire:

"Whereas the *Cahiers* search for 'meaning' is in the disjuncture between content and form, signified and sign, the ideology and the text, what is not said, in the hollows and in the gaps, the analysis by John Smith of Hitchcock's English works accepts the coherence of Hitchcock's apparent ideological project (. . .)."

If *Cahiers* explores 'breaks,' Smith is after unities and synthesis and the films which appear most coherent (form and content perfectly integrated) are those which are deemed 'best'.

It can be assumed that where Smith finds patterns of meaning re-asserted and developed in Hitchcock as signs of coherence of Hitchcock's world (ideology), the *Cahiers* would find precisely in an "apparent formal coherence . . . that it is riddled with cracks." *(Screen,* vol. 13, no 3, Autumn 1972, pp. 2-3).

Where Richards differs from Smith is in his refusal to evaluate the films he discusses: "I am not embarked primarily on a critical or aesthetic evaluation of films. My role is much more that of a textual critic and I have therefore looked at both 'good' and 'bad' films in search of the themes that concern me (. . .)." *(Visions of Yesterday,* p. xv). Again, in the *Cambridge Review:* "In my recent book (. . .), I adopted yet another method of evaluating films (I take it he means "analysing"). This was to look at them not as works of art but as artefacts. It is the approach of an historian and sociologist rather than that of an art critic. (. . .) There was no attempt to judge the visual or aesthetic merit of the films, no discussion of whether the films were 'good' or 'bad' " (p. 10). How far this is true can be judged by the following extract from *Vision of Yesterday:*

> The film which triumphantly draws together all these threads is John Cromwell's *The Prisoner of Zenda,* one of the purest and noblest fables of love and honour ever put on film. The direction is faultless, the writing brilliant, the production impeccable, the score unforgettable and the actors so perfect that one would be forgiven for thinking that the parts had been written for them. What more can one say? Glittering set-pieces are handled with elegance and panache, the intimate moments with sensivity and sincerity and the film reaches its climax with perhaps the most exciting and certainly the most amusing sword duel in all cinema. It is Hollywood myth-making at its most potent and most evocative. (p. 72).

So what Screen wrote about John M. Smith does obtain after all.

Richards (although he claims to be an historian, a sociologist, rather than an art critic) does belong to what *Screen* called (in 1972) "the mainstream of British film criticism," with its refusal to believe in a distinction between form and content. The *Cahiers* and *Screen* itself, on the other hand, search for meaning "in that area of separation within and between signs, and, by extension be-

Images of royalty: George Sanders in Preminger's Forever Amber

tween form and content, language and thought" *(loc. cit.)*. I may mention in passing that the formulation of this approach by *Screen* is rather unorthodox. To talk of "the disjuncture between (...) signified and sign" (or even, for that matter, between signified and signifier) when one invokes linguistics is, to say the least, unexpected: the definition of a sign by Saussure is the *indissoluble* union of signified and signifier. One might as well use behaviorism as a frame of reference and then move on to the distinction between mind and body. The same is true, of course, of *Screen's* embarking on the possible separation between "langauge and thought," a separation which, far from breaking fresh ground, would only herald a return to a certain idealistic ideology much despised by *Screen*. To sum up: when *Screen* makes a distinction between form and content, it should be clear that there is neither strictly meaningless form nor, certainly, formless content, and that what *Screen* must have in mind is the familiar opposition between the apparent (explicit) content and the (implicit) content of the form, an opposition which goes at least as far back as Nietzsche. To use Christian Metz's linguistic terminology, when one is after *signs and meaning* in the cinema, one searches for "connotation," not just "denotation". The signifier of "connotation" (e.g. a particular atmosphere) in fact includes both the signifier (e.g. camera angle, lighting) and the signified (e.g. a street), or the whole *sign, of* "denotation" (Quelques points de sémiologie du cinéma," in *La Linguistique*, PUF, Paris, 1966, no 2, pp. 53-69). To put it a slightly different way, one might say that the explicit content of a film (and in particular its plot and dialogue) is only part of the *form* that expresses the implicit meaning.

To go back to Richards vs. *Cahiers:* the basic difference between the approaches boils down to an examination of the explicit vs. an analysis of the implicit. The amusing thing is that the starting points are somewhat similar; both methods, after all, are self-admittedly concerned with ideology. Thus the *Cahiers:* "One of the consequences of the 1929 economic crisis was that the major banking groups (...) strengthened their grip on the Hollywood firms which were having problems (...). 20th Century Fox (which produced *Young Mr Lincoln),* because of its links with Big Business, also supports the Republican Party (...).

"All this allows us to assume that in 1938-39, Fox, managed by the (also) Republican Zanuck, participated in its own way in the Republican offensive by producing a film on the legendary character Lincoln" (in English in *Screen, op. cit.* pp. 8-11). Richards in turn: "In its heyday (1920s to 1950s), the cinema was a large-scale industry, run by the bosses of the big companies. The great movie moguls, in the nature of their breed, were men of an Establishment turn of mind and the product they sanctioned consciously or unconsciously reflected this" *(Cambridge Review,* p. 10). Afterwards, of course, the methods diverge widely. The *Cahiers* are politically naive (why should a film about Lincoln automatically be part of the Republican strategy in 1939? In the French presidential election of 1974, De Gaulle was mentioned by the Communists more often than by Giscard d'Estaing. The very fact that, according to the *Cahiers* themselves, a Democrat-inspired *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* should have been made at the same time makes nonsense of the suggestion), but their actual textual reading is perceptive. They feel that "an artistic product cannot be linked to its socio-historical context according to a linear, expressive, direct causality (unless one falls into a reductionist historical determinism)" *(Screen,* p. 7). Which is exactly what Richards is doing. In spite of his proviso ("consciously *or unconsciously"),* he clearly adheres to the *reflection* theory, to the view that a particular ideology — imperialism — unambiguously expresses itself in a body of films.

What should be noted, however, is that the *Cahiers* and Jeffrey Richards are not in fact writing about the same films, or about the same type of film. In spite of their political awakening, the *Cahiers* have remained faithful to their established pantheon of American *auteurs:* John Ford *(Young Mr Lincoln),* Josef von Sternberg *(Morocco),* George Cukor *(Sylvia Scarlett)* . . . This is a cinema which is "classic" not just because it "has been described as based on analogical representation and linear narrative" *(Screen, p. 6),* but also because it is made up of "classics." The *Cahiers* may well have rejected the *auteur* theory; yet they keep on talking about "Ford's fiction," "Ford's morality and ideology," "a Fordian character" *(Screen,* p. 13; significantly, the original French text uses the adjective "fordien" in all three instances: *Cahiers* no 223, August-September 1970, p. 32).

Richards, of course, talks about Ford — and about *Young Mr Lincoln* in particular. But the reader has the impression that he only skims the surface, that the explicity ideological point of view from which "Ford's fiction" is looked at is narrow and superficial. On the contrary, Richards is convincing when writing about "The Cinema of Empire" or "The Cinema of Monarchy," that is to say about specific *genres* rather than *auteurs.* At this point one might be tempted to think that the *Cahiers* method and the Richards approach are not so much contradictory as complementary: the *Cahiers* in-depth analysis, with its combination of marxism, freudism and semiotics and detailed listing of "artefacts" being more convenient for genre films. One might therefore recall the very opposition outlined by *Cahiers* between "inscription" and "flat illustration" *(Screen, p. 39).* In *auteur* films such as Ford's, the ideological project is "inscribed" within a cinematic texture and this very process of "writing," of "inscribing," distorts, deviates, subverts the ideological project. In genre films, on the contrary, we are dealing with the "flat illustration" of the dominant ideology, the reflection theory obtains, and the Richards approach is valid, because it is, so to speak, sufficient.

Such a division of labour would be pleasant and reassuring; however, my feeling is that, while we may all practise it for the sake of convenience, its theoretical foundation is rather shaky. Most *auteur*-directed films are also, if not primarily, genre films, and to talk about a director "transcending the genre's limits," as the phrase used to go, does not take us very far. Sirk's weepies may well subvert their ideological project; yet they are archetypal of the genre. The *Cahiers* might answer that Sirk's case is similar to Ford's, that the very excesses of his writing bring his film close to parody perhaps. The difficulty is that there are countless bad "genre films" which are equally excessive in the way they are written. The difficulty is that the "chinks in the armour," rightly detected by *Cahiers* in *Young Mr Lincoln,* are also to be found in the most anonymous productions. I am quite sure that posters in the Paris or the London underground can be successfully submitted to Lacanian analysis; this will not prove them all to be works of art. Conversely, are we agreed that works of art *must* be complex and subject to internal strife? My point, quite modestly, is that both Richards's surface reading and the *Cahiers's* "scanning" are needed. Explicit meanings should not be discarded too lightly. Thus *Cahiers* had set out, among other things, to distinguish the relation of *Young Mr Lincoln* "to other films, themselves held in an intertextual space" *(Screen.* p. 6); here it would seem that Richards is stronger and more thorough. A properly intertextual reading of *Young Mr Lincoln* would certainly look in some detail at other Ford films; at other films about Lincoln; at other films starring Henry Fonda. Instead of which the actual analysis, in *Cahiers,* is satisfied with a brief mention of *Two Rode Together* and *Fort Apache,* as well as with one of Murnau's *Nosteratu.* In his chapter on Ford, Jeffrey Richards points to "strong links" between *Young Mr Lincoln* and *My Darling Clementine:* the same actor (Fonda), with identical "tiny details of character and habit," the same "Christ parallel," and the riding away at the end *(Visions of Yesterday,* p. 278). Personally, I should have thought that a discussion of Lincoln in the American cinema had to refer to D. W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* and that the concept of the "Law" in Ford's fiction should be examined in the light of *The Hurricane* as well as of *Young Mr Lincoln:* whereas Henry Fonda represents the Law that "separates Good from Evil" *(Screen,* p. 22), Raymond Massey is, in the former film, an incarnation of the perverted, repressive law — the letter rather than the spirit.

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In recent years we have heard much about (political) ideology, how it is subverted, how it creeps back in disguise. Perhaps we might hear a little about how aesthetic choices are still made even though they tend to remain hidden and implicit.

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